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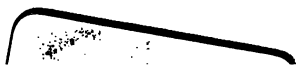
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INTRICATE PATHS.



INTRICATE PATHS.

BY

C. L. J. S.

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive."



LONDON:
SAMUEL TINSLEY,
10, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.

1876.

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251. d. 553.



INTRICATE PATHS.

CHAPTER I.

IN a lovely part of Devonshire stood a mansion of Elizabethan architecture, surrounded by an extensive park; this property had been in the possession of an old county family, of the name of Allington, for many generations. The present representative of this family is a Colonel Allington, who had married, about nineteen years before the date of this history, the lovely daughter of a certain Lord St. Maure, whom he had long admired. Soon after that important event, he quitted the army, and from that time both Colonel and Mrs. Allington had lived a very retired life, de-

voting themselves to the education of their children, four in number.

Mary, the eldest, inherited her mother's gentle disposition, but not her beauty, though a sweet expression redeemed her from being pronounced plain.

Ethel, the second girl, on the contrary, was decidedly beautiful; small, regular features, combined with an exquisitely fair complexion, and expressive brown eyes, were the chief characteristics of her face; but we must not forget to remark on the golden hair, which was still allowed to fall in masses over her shoulders, although the owner had almost attained the mature age of seventeen.

Mabel, her constant companion, was a bright, lively girl, who bid fair to be very pretty, with brown hair and laughing blue eyes.

The last of the family only remains to be mentioned, and that is Granville, the only son, aged fourteen. He had been sent to Eton a short time before the date of which we are now writing. It had been the first

break in the family circle, and all the household missed the lively boy very much at first ; but his parents felt it their duty to part with him, and trusted that the impressions he had received at home would preserve him through the temptations of his school career.

It was on a lovely day in July, that the three sisters were standing at the front door of Melville (such was the name of the house and park), evidently waiting for some one.

"Mamma says I am to go for a driver with her to-day, as it is my turn," remarked Ethel.

"She is going to call on those new people who have come to Ashton Lodge, I heard her say so at luncheon," said Mary.

"Well, I hope they will be nice ; how many are there of them?" asked the youngest of the trio.

"Only a lady and gentleman, Mr. and Mrs. Heath ; oh, by-the-by, they have a young nobleman staying with them, a Lord Trevor, son of the Earl of Melton, who will come in for the title some day."

"Where did you learn all that news, Mary?" asked Mabel, laughing; "how shabby of you to keep it all to yourself; now, of course, I am quite anxious to see this Lord Trevor; mind, Ethel, I shall expect a full and particular account of him, if you see him to-day."

"I quite forgot all about him, until you began to speak of the Heaths," Mary said.

"What an unnatural girl! An eligible young nobleman in the place, and to forget even his existence!" remarked Mabel.

"How do you know he is eligible? he may have left a wife and family in London, for all we know," replied Mary, with a laugh.

The approach of Mademoiselle Chevrier and the carriage, almost at the same moment, prevented further conversation for the time. And the two girls were soon walking across the park with their governess, while Ethel and her mother drove in the direction of Ashton Lodge.

"Now, Ethel, I am determined to hear all about those people, mamma and you called on to-day," exclaimed Mabel Alling-

ton, on the evening of the same day, as the sisters were waiting in the drawing-room for their parents to come out from dinner. "You know I have a piece of woman's curiosity in my composition. And you say you saw Lord Tre——, what is his name? And you positively have not said whether he is young, old, handsome, or ugly; do enlighten me a little on the subject."

"You will be able to judge soon, for mamma has asked him to come here for lawn tennis, the day after to-morrow."

"And you mean to say I am to be kept in ignorance until then, you heartless creature, when you know I am dying to hear all about him?"

"What nonsense you are talking, Mabel," interposed Mary. "What possible difference can it make to you what those people are like? but there is mamma, so you can ask her anything you want to know."

"And what is it somebody wants to know?" inquired Mrs. Allington, entering the room.

"Oh, mamma, I want to know about the

people at Ashton Lodge. Ethel won't tell me anything."

"And what does my inquisitive little girl want to know about them?" asked Mrs. Allington, smiling.

"Everything, mamma. Are they nice? Are they young? Are they——"

"Stop, Mabel; one question at a time. As to their being nice, I could hardly judge in so short a time; and they are certainly not old. They have not been long married; but they are coming to our garden party in a few days, and we shall see more of them then."

"Well, I suppose I must be satisfied," said Mabel, assuming a resigned expression.

CHAPTER II.

THE day for the garden party arrived, and went off, as those kind of parties generally do, with the usual amount of playing, gossip, and flirtation. Mr. and Mrs. Heath,

with their guest, were there. The latter was handsome enough, even for Mabel's high-flown ideas. Ethel and Mabel flitted about from group to group, a pretty sight in their white dresses and flowing hair ; the latter was a general favourite, with her lively manner ; while Ethel, a shade steadier, attracted as much attention by her beauty ; the two seemed rather to throw Mary into the shade, although she was not entirely unappreciated.

The much-neglected game of croquet was patronized by a few who feared the heat, and among them was Ethel and Lord Trevor, who played in the same set, much to Mabel's disgust, who, as she expressed it afterwards, "had not a chance of speaking to him when once Ethel had got hold of him." However, she amply consoled herself by a most lively and energetic game at lawn tennis, which she declared was far more sensible and interesting than anything so slow as croquet. A week passed away, and the Allingtons were continually meeting their new acquaintances, and especially the young lord,

who seemed to have discovered some great attraction at Melville.

"Really, Ethel, what has come over you lately? if it had not been for Mary, I should never have known that you had met Lord Trevor in your walk to-day," exclaimed Mabel one evening rather more than a week after the garden party.

"What is that about Lord Trevor?" inquired Mrs. Allington, looking up; "you never told *me* anything about meeting him, Ethel."

"I did not think it would be particularly interesting to you," said Ethel, her colour rising.

"I thought that my children knew anything which interests them must interest me also," said Mrs. Allington, gently.

"Oh, mother dear, of course; but then—but then—" said Ethel, going up to her, and putting her arm round her neck.

"Well, Ethel," remarked Mabel, "you certainly are the strangest girl I ever saw—at least lately you have become so. If you

were older, I should begin to think you were in love."

"Silence, Mabel!" said her mother gravely, and drawing Ethel closer to her side.

"What a fuss everyone is making," said Ethel, "just because I did not happen to mention an incident in my walk!"

"I should have thought nothing of it," replied Mrs. Allington, "if it had not been so entirely different to my Ethel's usual straightforwardness; but we will say no more about it."

They all returned to their former occupations, but were more silent than before. Mabel felt rather like a naughty child, and Ethel had her own thoughts to engross her.

Mary made a few attempts at conversation, but receiving little response, soon relapsed into silence. Meanwhile, Mrs. Allington was weighing in her mind Mabel's thoughtless words. "In love!" it was nonsense, Ethel seemed such a child, barely seventeen; the very idea seemed absurd. But if it were true, how strangely blind she

herself had been, and what course would now be the best to pursue? Should she consult with her husband? But no; it was too ridiculous to be thought of. She would watch, and at any rate be quite certain before breathing a word on the subject.

The following day at luncheon, Colonel Allington suddenly remarked, "I met Heath this morning, and asked him to bring his wife and friend to dine with us in a quiet way. They seem nice people—quite an acquisition to our limited circle of acquaintance. I should like to show them a little attention. Do you not like the arrangement?" added he, as a momentary shade crossed Mrs. Allington's brow. "They seem to find it very quiet here, and I think we ought to allow the girls to enter a little more into society before taking them to London, as we intend doing in the spring."

"I shall be very happy to see them," replied his wife, thinking she would have then an opportunity of noticing whether there was any ground for the suspicions so recently aroused.

"There is the front-door bell!" exclaimed Ethel, as the two younger girls sat at tea with their governess that evening; "so I suppose they have arrived. There will be plenty of time for you and me to dress after tea, Mabel; I suppose we are to wear our white muslins?"

"Yes, yours with blue ribbons, and mine with cerise; and you will have to sing, Ethel. There's a treat in store for you. I am so thankful I have not begun to learn."

"But you will have to play, which I consider much worse."

"Ah! I forgot that," exclaimed Mabel, with an expression of dismay. "Well, I will begin to practise at once. Do allow me, mademoiselle."

"I do not think your mamma would at all approve of your jumping up from tea in that way; but if you are not sure of your music, you had better try a piece through."

Mabel, however, had already seated herself at the piano, without waiting for permission.

"What a blessing ours is a large house,

or these harmonious sounds would be heard in the drawing-room. Don't you want to try over a song, Ethel? Oh, I forgot, you're so superior to——. Why she's actually gone, and I've been wasting my words. I wish she wasn't so quiet in her movements."

"You make so much noise, chattering and playing at the same time," said mademoiselle laughing, "that it is impossible to hear anything else. I hope you don't intend to continue in that strain all the evening?"

"Well, I'll try and quiet down, though I do feel rather wild to-night. If I don't take care, I shall be getting into a scrape, like I did last evening. Wasn't that a dreadful slip of the tongue, mademoiselle? Oh, you were not in the drawing-room last night, though."

"You must try and be more thoughtful for the future; now it is time for you to dress. Perhaps your mamma will excuse me to-night?"

"I am sure she will, if you really wish it: but she is always glad if you will come down—that is, if you care to."

“Your mamma is very kind, but——”

But Mabel was gone, and mademoiselle left to her own reflections.

In the dining-room, Mr. Heath and Colonel Allington are carrying on an animated political discussion, under cover of which, Lord Trevor is inquiring of Mary, next to whom he is seated, for her sisters. “They are quite well, thank you,” replies Mary; “you will see them by-and-by.”

“Oh, then,” said Lord Trevor, “they are not yet promoted to the distinction of dining late; I did not know you were so particular in the country.”

“Well,” rejoined Mary, “mamma prefers to keep us entirely in the schoolroom till we are come out.”

“Then you are the only one who has attained that enviable position?”

“I have not exactly, but I believe I shall next season, as papa and mamma intend taking us up to town.”

The conversation was here interrupted by an appeal from Colonel Allington, who was getting worsted in the argument, and

soon after the ladies adjourned to the drawing-room, where they found Ethel and Mabel. The gentlemen speedily followed, and Lord Trevor seized on a vacant seat which happened to be next to Ethel.

"Well, what do you think of Devonshire, now you have had a little more time to see the country?" began she, turning towards him.

"I think the scenery perfectly beautiful; we went up the Dart yesterday, and I was delighted with the view on either side; it is quite like the Moselle in miniature. I believe next week my cousins intend going to Linton, Lynmouth, and Ilfracombe, of which I have heard a great deal."

"But you ought to have explored Devonshire before you went abroad, because it must look tame after all the beautiful places you have seen."

"On the contrary, I think one appreciates one's own country all the more, after being in foreign ones. You see I'm a true Englishman!"

"I am glad of it. But don't you find it dull here after London?"

"Find it dull! I have scarcely ever enjoyed myself so much before."

"But if you are accustomed to balls and that sort of thing, you must miss them, for such an event rarely happens here—not that it makes any difference to me, for I am not yet released from school-room bondage."

"So your sister was telling me. I suppose you are looking forward anxiously to the happy moment of release?"

"Oh, not in the least. I am very happy as I am, and have no particular ambition to go to balls."

Looking up, Ethel found her mother's eyes fixed upon her, and heard her voice saying, "Ethel, dear, will you sing something?" and the next instant found herself at the piano, with Lord Trevor begging permission to turn the pages of her music for her. There was perfect silence as her sweet, clear voice rang through the room, and Lord Trevor, though he had heard all the best singers of the day, thought he had never listened with such pleasure as to this simple

song. It was a Scotch ballad, called "Castles in the Air," and, as she sang, many a fair edifice rose in the mind of him who stood by. The close of the song recalled him to the present moment, and he thanked her in a way that brought a blush to her cheek, which was not lost on Mrs. Allington, who watched her with increasing anxiety.

The evening passed very quickly to at least *two* people, and, it being Saturday, Mrs. Heath made a move for departure rather early.

"I suppose we shall go to the same church as you attend?" said Lord Trevor, rising reluctantly to say good-bye.

"Well, I suppose you will, considering it is the only one within ten miles," replied Ethel, smiling.

Mrs. Allington did not soon sleep that night. She was thinking over the events of the evening, and again debating whether she should confide to her husband those suspicions which had now assumed so much more defined a character. She felt so fearful

lest the young nobleman's evident admiration for her child should prove merely a passing fancy to be forgotten as quickly as aroused, and which, though perfectly harmless to himself, might have a far different effect on Ethel's affectionate, unsophisticated nature. Finally, the anxious mother resolved to leave the trouble in Higher Hands, and at last fell asleep with the happy consciousness that all would be ordered aright.

CHAPTER III.

SUNDAY morning dawned bright and beautiful, and the Sabbath stillness seemed to impart itself to all nature.

The church was about a mile off, and the elder members of the family generally drove there, while the younger ones pleased themselves. Mary preferred driving that morning, so the other two started with mademoiselle, across the fields. They had not proceeded far before Mabel exclaimed,

"Well, how extraordinary ! There are the Heaths and Lord Trevor just in front of us ; what a long time he is staying with them, do walk slowly or we shall overtake them ; and really if we are continually meeting we shall get tired of each other."

"What nonsense, Mabel !" said her sister. "If they are nice people we shall not get tired of them so soon ; besides, I thought you were so anxious to see them at one time."

"So I was, but you know it *is* possible to have *too* much of a good thing. You don't seem to think so, however."

"Opinions differ," answered Ethel, shortly.

"Well, here we are on the heels of the subjects of our dispute, so it is too late to think of beating a retreat," said Mabel.

They were too near now to carry on a conversation unheard, and their friends turning at that moment, the parties joined, and proceeded the rest of the way together. As the path became narrower, they divided, and Mabel, partly to spite her sister, walked on in front with Lord Trevor.

Mr. Heath did not find Ethel a very animated companion, for many of his remarks passed unheeded, or were answered at random, for Ethel's thoughts were with the couple in front, and she wondered what they were talking about.

They separated at the church door, and the Allingtons passed up the aisle to their family pew, where the others were already seated.

Once, Ethel's eyes wandered in the direction of the Heaths' pew, but were immediately withdrawn, for she found Lord Trevor's glance fixed upon her, nor did she again venture to look that way.

A little crowd usually gathered at the church porch after the service was over, to exchange greetings; this, however, Mrs. Allington always endeavoured to escape, for she disliked the system of talking on indifferent subjects the moment they were outside the church walls. So shaking hands with a few of her acquaintance, she stepped into the carriage, telling two of the girls to follow her.

"Come, Mabel, jump in," said her father, as a little discussion arose as to who should walk. So Mabel obeyed, and the carriage drove off.

"Ethel, my child, how tired you look!" said Mrs. Allington, as they came into the house. "I never intended you to walk both ways; you must rest with me in the drawing-room after dinner instead of going into the schoolroom.

As Ethel and Mabel were taking off their walking things, the latter inquired, "Did you walk back with the Heaths?" and then, before Ethel had time to reply, "My conscience has been reproaching me dreadfully for being so selfish this morning. I knew you wanted to walk with Lord Trevor, but I felt rather spiteful, and I really wished to see what he was like."

"Why should you think I wanted to walk with him?" asked Ethel, colouring.

"I am *not* so blind as some people think," replied Mabel, gaily.

"What *do* you mean?"

"My dear Ethel, I did not intend to make

you blush so ; it is a good thing I am the only one in the room."

"What nonsense, Mabel ! I wish you would explain yourself."

"No, not now ; never mind, it is only a fancy of mine. But you have not yet answered my question."

"What ? About walking back with the Heaths ? of course we did, as we were all coming in the same direction."

The next day, as Ethel and Mabel were sauntering down the park, waiting for Mary and their governess to join them for a walk, they saw a figure approaching them hastily, which proved to be none other than the Heaths' young friend.

"Oh, Miss Allington, is that you ?" he exclaimed, as he came up to them.

"Well, I suppose so," said Ethel laughing, vainly endeavouring to prevent the colour rising to her cheeks.

"As large as life, and twice as natural," chimed in Mabel.

"I have just heard from my father, and he wants me in London as soon as possible

to-day, on business about which I shall most probably be obliged to go abroad. I could not leave without first coming up to wish you all good-bye."

Mabel said something about returning to find Mary, and left Ethel and Lord Trevor by themselves. Ethel did not know whether to be pleased or not at this arrangement, but turned to walk back with her companion almost unconsciously.

"I cannot say how sorry I am to leave this place, where I have spent the happiest hours of my life," he said, looking at her attentively.

"It is a great pity," she replied, endeavouring to appear as unconcerned as possible, "especially as you have arranged some excursions for this week."

"Do you think that is the only reason I am sorry to leave?" he said earnestly.

Something in his tone made her look up, and her eyes meeting his, saw so much tenderness in his glance, that she involuntarily drooped hers, while a bright flush overspread her face. That look revealed more to her

than many words—it told her she was loved—and the words that followed confirmed the look ; for almost before she was aware of it, she heard him asking her to be his wife, and awaiting anxiously for an answer. She felt in a tumult of happiness, though not altogether unmixed with fear. “What would her father and mother say?” Again she found him entreating her to say if his love was returned. Then she discovered that she was expected to speak, but what should she say? On the question being repeated with increased anxiety, she gave a little half-frightened “Yes.” Hardly had the word escaped her, than she felt a pair of strong arms enfolding her, and a kiss pressed on her lips.

“Stop!” she said, disengaging herself. “Papa and mamma don’t know, and I am so young—not much more than a child—your father, too?”

“Nothing matters so long as we love one another. Your father *must* give his consent ; and *my* father—he has never refused me anything yet, and surely he will not,

when he sees his son's happiness is concerned."

They lingered yet awhile among the old oak trees, until Ethel suddenly remembered her sisters would be wondering what had become of them, and suggested the propriety of returning to the house.

"Must we?" said he. "I can't bear the thought of leaving you now. It is even worse than it seemed before; but perhaps we had better, as I must see your father, and I have not much time, if I go by the train I intended."

So they walked slowly towards the house, feeling strangely happy in the possession of one another's love. As they approached the front entrance, they met Mary and Mabel. Ethel felt very guilty, and rushing past her sisters, she did not stop till she reached her mother's sitting-room.

Mrs. Allington was writing when Ethel burst into the room, and throwing herself at her mother's feet, buried her face in her lap, while her whole frame trembled with emotion."

"Ethel, my child! what is the meaning of this?" said her mother anxiously.

"What excites you in this way?"

"Oh, mother! Lord Trevor! He says he—loves me!" and she hid her burning face again in the folds of her mother's dress.

Mrs. Allington passed her arm round Ethel, pressing her tenderly to her side, and said gently,

"Well, my darling, and can you return his love?"

The answer came very low, so low indeed that Mrs. Allington was obliged to bend down to catch it. It did not give her very much surprise to hear what that answer was. She had not watched her child's conduct in vain. When she had succeeded in soothing her a little she left her, promising to return shortly, and that in the meanwhile she should not be disturbed.

In about a quarter of an hour there was a knock at the door, and before Ethel had time to speak, Lord Trevor entered.

"It is all right, darling," said he; "that

is to say, as right as I suppose we can expect at present; we have Colonel and Mrs. Allington's consent, provided my father gives his, which, indeed, I am sure he could not refuse, and if we are both of the same mind when you have attained the sober age of twenty. I don't think there is much doubt of *that*, do you, my Ethel?"

The allotted ten minutes flew all too quickly, and then Colonel and Mrs. Allington appeared. "You only came to say good-bye, remember," said the latter, smiling.

Lord Trevor rose, and the colonel drawing his daughter to him, said,

"I don't know whether I have been altogether wise in permitting this, my little Ethel, but I trust it may prove both for your present and eternal good; and now, my dear Trevor, I fear you must cut short your farewells, that is, if you wish to see your father to-night."

Ethel accompanied him a little way down the avenue, and there, under the oaks, where he had told his love, the young pair

parted, looking forward to a happy reunion ere long. Ah! they little thought of what would transpire before that took place.

CHAPTER IV.

"I FEEL certain something important is going to happen," exclaimed Mabel, rushing into the schoolroom in a state of great excitement. "First, we met Lord Trevor, and thinking to make up for yesterday, I left him and Ethel alone. When I next see them, Ethel looks like a naughty child afraid of a punishment, and directly we get to the house, rushes off, like a wild cat, to mamma's room, where she remains for the rest of the morning. And wonders never cease, for papa, mamma, and Lord Trevor, have been closeted in papa's study for nearly half an hour. What is it all about, mademoiselle?"

"How should I know, my dear? most likely nothing at all, it is only your——"

"Most likely everything," said Mabel,

cutting short her governess's speech by running off in search of Ethel, to try and obtain a more satisfactory explanation from her. She found her in their bed-room.

"What is all this mystery about, Ethel?" she began, and then added, "You don't mean to say Lord Trevor has——"

"Yes. Oh, Mabel, I *am* so happy."

"What are you crying for, then?" said the other incredulously. "People don't cry when they are happy, do they? Or—oh, you are *not* going into hysterics, are you?" she continued, with a look of alarm. "Dear me, I hope I shall never have an offer if the consequences are always like this."

"Oh, Mabel," said Ethel, looking up, laughing, "how can you be so ridiculous? You don't understand a bit."

"No, I know I don't; and you are really engaged, Ethel? I can hardly believe it, it is like a dream. I little thought I was so near the truth the other evening, but 'there's many a true word said in jest,' as the saying is; but there is the luncheon-

bell—do you really think you will be prosaic enough to eat luncheon, or do you contemplate living on ambrosia and nectar?"

So chatting away the two girls entered the dining-room. When luncheon was over, Mabel lingered behind the others and going up to her mother, said, "Is Ethel going for a drive with you to-day, mamma?"

"I thought perhaps you and Ethel might prefer to walk together to-day," said Mrs. Allington. "I suppose Ethel has told you all about——"

"Yes, mamma, but we cannot have a confidential talk while mademoiselle is between us, so if you don't mind I think Ethel would rather go with you."

"I shall be delighted to have her then, dear."

"And, mamma, do you mind my telling mademoiselle and Mary about Ethel and Lord Trevor?"

"No, dear; but no one else remember, it is not yet quite settled, you know. Now run and get ready for your walk."

On the following morning, Colonel Allington

handed Ethel a letter across the table from the post-bag. She seized it with trembling hands, and her mother gave her leave to go to her room to read the contents, of which permission she gladly availed herself. She held the precious letter for a few moments unopened, thinking "suppose it was to say the Earl refused his consent," and if this were the case, how could she bear to have her newly-found happiness thus cruelly torn away from her. She finally did the best thing she could have done under the circumstances, which was to tear open the envelope and put an end to her suspense by devouring the contents. She had hardly finished before her mother entered the room.

"Oh, mother, we have the Earl's consent to our engagement; he says he can trust Percy," exclaimed Ethel, a blush rising to her cheek as she pronounced the Christian name. "He says I am to call him that now it is really settled. He tells me, too, he is obliged to go abroad on business. A cousin of his is to accompany him, and he hopes not to be absent more than three

weeks, and on his return he will come down here to pay us a visit. But three weeks seems a long time to look forward to," she added, with a little sigh.

CHAPTER V.

ETHEL'S letters came regularly now for a fortnight, when they suddenly ceased ; this did not surprise her, as the last one she had received told her Lord Trevor hoped to start for England in two days, and his party were only waiting to join another before crossing some mountains, at the foot of which they were then staying. She therefore hardly expected another letter from Italy or the continent at all. Still, when days passed and brought no tidings of Percy's arrival in England, she began to grow uneasy and look forward with great anxiety to the arrival of the post-bag—each time, however, she was doomed to be disappointed. A fortnight at last passed away,

and Ethel had grown pale with the constant disappointments and anxiety she was enduring. Her parents watched her anxiously, and decided if nothing was heard soon, they would take active measures to discover the cause of this strange silence. The Heaths were unfortunately away or they could have inquired of them.

One day, when affairs were as we have described, Ethel and Mabel were in the dining-room after luncheon with their mother; the former carelessly took up the *Times* supplement, and was running her eye listlessly down the column, when a sudden exclamation made her mother look up in alarm just in time to see Ethel fall senseless from her chair. To hasten to her, lift her to the sofa, and send Mabel for restoratives, was the work of a few moments. Mabel was not long absent.

“What is the matter with Ethel, mother?” she asked, in a frightened tone of voice.

Her mother did not answer for a moment, as she was engaged applying restoratives, then turning, said to Mabel, “Send Marie or

some one here, and if your father is in the house, tell him."

Mabel ran off, glad to be of service, and soon returned with her governess. And finding she could do no more at present, as her father and Mary were out riding, a fact her mother had forgotten in the anxiety of the moment, she took up the paper that had fallen from her sister's grasp, to see if she could discover the cause of Ethel's sudden illness.

First she looked carefully down the list of deaths, and as she came to the end gave a little sigh of relief; it was not what she had feared. She glanced up at the marriages, and a name caught her eye that made her give a sudden start, and exclaim, "How wicked! How cruel!" And then, throwing the paper away, she started from her seat with a flushed face.

Her exclamations attracted Mrs. Allington's attention, and she turned to inquire the cause of them.

Mabel answered by picking up the paper

and pointing to a paragraph which read as follows :—

“ “ At Serano, Italy, Henry Percy Trevor—”

Mrs. Allington read no more, but pushing the paper from her, sank into a chair near, turning deadly pale, and pressing her forehead with one hand.

Mabel was frightened at the effects of her communication, and thinking she had better do her best to modify it, said : “ It may be a mistake, mother; you see the first name is wrong, it should be Herbert, not Henry.”

Mrs. Allington shook her head, despairingly. “ I fear it is too true, Mabel. But I dare not think of it now, for I must devote myself to our poor darling.”

It was a long time before Ethel opened her eyes, and when she did mademoiselle and Mabel withdrew, thinking it would be better for her to be alone with her mother.

By degrees the terrible truth dawned on Ethel's mind ; “ Oh mother, mother, tell me it is not true !” was her first agonised cry, as she clung to her.

"My poor darling," said Mrs. Allington, sadly, smoothing her hair caressingly.

"It is not true; I will never believe it; I would rather die than distrust my Percy. Yes, *my* Percy," she moaned.

Mrs. Allington scarcely knew how to answer her, but after a moment's thought, she said—

"My child, if it is God's will to send you this trial, will you not bow in submission and pray for grace to bear it patiently?"

"I could *never* bear it. It is too much, too much," sobbed Ethel.

"You will never be given more than you can bear, my Ethel," replied Mrs. Allington, gently. "You know who appoints us our sorrows, and if He is bringing you into suffering, it is for a wise purpose that we cannot see or understand. Only trust Him, and it must work for your good."

Thus did Mrs. Allington soothe her child, and she was thankful to see tears at last in Ethel's eyes, for she was becoming fearful of the effects of the shock she had received.

Finally, worn out in mind and body, Ethel fell asleep.

It was a sad tale Mrs. Allington had to relate when her husband and Mary returned from their ride. The Colonel was of course very angry, and pacing up and down the room, as was his wont at times, he exclaimed—

“How dare that fellow gain the affections of our daughter, only to break her heart!”

“It may be a mistake after all,” said his wife.

“A mistake! Not at all likely; the very place which he mentioned as the next stage in his homeward journey, and the name too——”

“The name is slightly different,” interposed Mrs. Allington.

“Merely a misprint. No, I see it all, now that it is too late. Fortunately, hardly anyone knows of this affair except ourselves, and those who do must be made to understand it is broken off.”

“The Heaths were to have returned yesterday; they, surely, will know all about it.

Can we not ask them ? In a case where our child's happiness is concerned, we ought to forget all pride."

"No," said Colonel Allington, sternly, "I will have nothing more said on the subject out of our own immediate family, and the sooner the whole business is forgotten the better I shall be pleased."

"But Ethel!" exclaimed his wife. "Do you think *she* can forget so easily?"

The colonel's features relaxed a little as he said—

"Poor child, but she is still very young ; and we must endeavour to make her forget all about this unhappy affair as soon as possible."

"I am afraid we shall not find that so easy," sighed the mother. "I must return to her now."

As soon as his wife had quitted the room, Colonel Allington rang the bell violently, and desired the footman who answered it to inform Miss Allington and Miss Mabel that he was awaiting them in the library.

CHAPTER VI.

A KNOCK came at the library door, but instead of the two girls, a servant came in with a note.

"Mr. Heath's groom has just brought this, sir," said the man, handing the letter to his master, and withdrawing.

Colonel Allington tore open the envelope with an exclamation of impatience. Inside was a short note in Mr. Heath's handwriting, and a foreign one enclosed. The small note ran as follows :

"DEAR COLONEL ALLINGTON,

"The enclosed will account for Lord Trevor's silence. I thought it was right you should know. Allow me to state how very much both Mrs. Heath and myself feel for your daughter. It must be a great blow to her and also to the earl. In great haste.

"Yours sincerely,

"H. A. HEATH."

Colonel Allington's brow grew more stern and angry as he came to the end, when muttering something about intruding pity where it was not asked, he struck a match, set light to both letters, and threw them into the fire-place, without reading the foreign one. Pride and anger were both working in his breast.

Oh, Colonel Allington, why did you not pause before committing such a hasty act? You little know the mischief you have done?

Perhaps the thought that he might have read the letter before destroying it did pass across his mind, but now it was too late to recall it; so he determined to say nothing about it to the rest of the family. At that moment Mary and Mabel entered.

"Did you want to speak to us, papa?" asked the former.

"Yes; it was merely to say that my orders are, that not a word of this affair about Ethel is to be breathed to a creature—not even to Granville. If you are questioned about it, say the engagement, if it

could be called one, was broken off. One thing more. I wish to break off our acquaintance with the Heaths; so if you meet them, you are only to bow, and not to speak to them—now you may go !”

Both the girls were awed by their father’s manner. They had never seen him so angry before. Even Mabel was quiet—an unusual thing for her.

Mrs. Allington had meanwhile gone to Ethel, and found her still asleep. As she watched her pale, troubled countenance, she endeavoured to subdue the anger that would arise against the object of her child’s distress, feeling sure that this trial had been sent in wisdom and love.

Yes, Ethel needed the trial to draw her affection and love from earthly things to the Fount from which all love springs. Brought up by Christian parents, she could hardly fail to be outwardly religious ; but as yet she had known little of heart religion. She had made an idol of Lord Trevor, and in mercy that earthly idol had been removed.

Ethel soon awoke, and anxiously inquired of her mother if everyone knew of the report.

As Mrs. Allington answered in the affirmative, she continued eagerly,

“And do they—do you—believe it of him? Answer me, mother,” she said, seizing her hands, and raising herself with energy. “Say, oh say, you believe it is false, as I do; and tell them all so, unless you wish me to be more wretched than I am already.”

Mrs. Allington was seriously alarmed at Ethel's excited manner and wild talking, and tried to quiet her by telling her they would do all they could to discover the truth, and would believe nothing of which they were not certain. She then left her with books or work near if she cared to take up either, while she herself went in search of Colonel Allington, to ask if it would not be the wisest thing to send for a doctor, as she was afraid of the effects of the shock Ethel had received on her naturally delicate constitution.

The doctor was accordingly sent for, to whom Colonel and Mrs. Allington explained that Ethel had been in trouble, without entering into particulars. He said there was not much the matter with her, she was not very strong, her mind should be diverted as much as possible; change of air and scene would be the best way of doing it.

As the girls' holidays were so near, their father and mother decided on taking them abroad, they would be especially glad to be out of the neighbourhood just then, that the nine days' wonder might pass away before their return.

At breakfast the next morning Colonel Allington informed Mary and Mabel of the arrangement, and that as Granville's holidays did not commence so soon he could join them abroad. Mabel's delight was unbounded at this news, and it served to divert everyone's mind save Mrs. Allington's and Ethel's. There were guide-books consulted and routes marked out, and all the delightful bustle of preparation began. Mabel vainly endeavoured to rouse Ethel to take

the same interest as she did in it. Her father hoped she would soon shake off her depression and join with zest in all their plans, but her mother could not feel so confident. They were all careful not to mention a word in disparagement of Lord Trevor before Ethel, as it only distressed her and did no good.

CHAPTER VII.

At last all the preparations were completed, and the day fixed for their departure proved fine and very propitious for their journey. Mabel was in her usual high spirits, and kept up the cheerfulness of the party, over whom a gloom had been cast by Ethel's sadness; but the thought of a two months' holiday spent in travelling abroad was too delightful a prospect for Mabel to be at all sober.

They parted from Mademoiselle Chevrier at Dover, where she crossed for Calais en route for Paris; and our party stayed the

night at the Lord Warden Hotel, starting for Ostend the next morning. On inquiring for an hotel at that place they found they were all full, so they were obliged to go on to Brussels that night. Arrived at Brussels they succeeded in securing a very good suite of rooms at the Hôtel de Belle Vue.

The next day was devoted to seeing the principal galleries of pictures and the beautiful Cathedral of St. Gudule. In a city like Brussels, with so many objects of interest to visit, a week soon slips away; so our party found, and the day Granville was expected quickly came. His father went to Ostend to meet him, and they arrived at the hotel about half-past six in the evening. Granville was in high spirits, as might be expected, at the novelty before him, and feeling himself "immensely obliged to Ethel for so considerately becoming delicate and requiring change just as the holidays began," as he expressed himself to Mabel. He had been told nothing of her trouble, and now and then would come out with most incon-

venient questions as to what had become of the young nobleman who had paid Ethel such attention. He was very anxious they should all go down to the table d'hôte the evening he arrived, a thing they had before avoided on Ethel's account. Granville could not understand that at all. "If she were well enough to go out she was well enough to go down to dinner." He argued, "It will do you good, Ethel; you'll see ever so many people, and it will be such fun; do come."

Ethel hesitated, she would have preferred not going, and her mother did not urge her doing so.

"Well," exclaimed Mabel, "Ethel and I will have dinner up here, and you all go down."

"Oh no, May, that will never do," said her brother; "it does not matter, I shall enjoy it just as much here."

"No," said Ethel with an effort, "I will go down." And when once her mind was made up nothing could induce her to change her determination. Mrs. Allington

passed her arm round her child's waist and kissed her fondly. She saw and appreciated the effort it had cost Ethel to come to this conclusion.

"How awfully good of you, Ethel," said Mabel, as the sisters were dressing for dinner.

"No, it is not good of me," said Ethel with a sigh. "I fear this misery is making me very selfish. I think of no one but myself."

"No one could ever accuse *you* of selfishness; if anyone is, I am sure I am."

"Don't fish for compliments, Mabel," said her sister. It was the first time she had spoken cheerfully since the blow that had come upon her.

"I wish I could see you happy again and like yourself," exclaimed Mabel; to whom the last speech had suddenly brought Ethel's former cheerfulness into contrast with her conduct of the last week or more.

"I don't think I ever can be really happy again. Oh Mabel!" Ethel continued,

the tears coming into her eyes ; “ if you knew what a blank life seems to me now, and it may be for so long. I am still very young.”

“ Don’t talk like that, Ethel, I can’t bear to hear you ; you would not wish to die yet. I am sure I should never make myself miserable or trouble my head over any one who chose to play *me* false.”

“ Mabel ! Mabel ! it is not true. I will never believe it of him,” said her sister, seizing her hand eagerly.

“ How else can you account for his silence then ? I have avoided speaking of this before because I was afraid of distressing you, but I must say out my mind on the subject now.”

“ He may have been murdered or killed in an accident,” said Ethel in a low tone, with a shudder.

Their conversation was interrupted by Granville, who knocked at the door, saying the others had gone down to the table d’hôte, and he was waiting for them.

The following day they started for Trèves, the oldest town in Germany, with its many interesting relics. It sounded very strange to the English ears of the younger members of the family to hear German spoken by all around them. Granville amused himself by getting up questions to ask of the passers-by: when the answers came, however, he was quite bewildered and obliged to call his sisters to the rescue. After spending two days in this ancient town they started for Coblenz. It was on a lovely morning at 5 a.m. that the Allingtons took their tickets and went on board a steamer which was to take them down the Moselle. All the party were enchanted with the scenery which met their view as they passed down the river, and Mabel made rapid little sketches at many of the places where they stopped to take in passengers.

As Granville and Mabel were standing at one time a little apart from the rest, amusing themselves by criticising some of their fellow-passengers, the former suddenly

exclaimed: "What is the matter with Ethel, May? I never saw her so down in the dumps before. She looks as if she had all the misery of the world on her shoulders, and positively I have not seen her laugh since I joined you. What have you been doing to her while I was away?"

"Oh, poor Ethel! She is not strong, you know, and is rather depressed."

"Depressed! so it appears," answered he drily.

Mabel found it anything but an easy thing to ward off Granville's suspicions at times.

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM Coblenz the Allingtons travelled to Saltzburgh by way of Stuttgart and Munich, and here they entered the Tyrol. Mabel's delight knew no bounds at the lovely views by which they were now surrounded, and even Ethel roused herself at the grandeur of the mountain scenery. Mabel's

sketch-book was soon nearly filled, and she began trying to copy, by way of variety, the different peasant costumes which are so picturesque in the Tyrol. Ethel did not seem to have energy for anything of that kind, and Mrs. Allington, who was watching her with an anxious eye, determined to speak to her about her duty not to brood over her misery. She chose the time for doing so when the others had gone on an excursion to an old castle situated on the Mönchberg, which was considered too fatiguing for either Mrs. Allington or Ethel.

"Yes, mamma, I know—I feel how selfish I am," she answered after her mother had finished speaking; "but if I only knew what had become of Percy I should not mind so much. Don't try to persuade me that it is what you all imagine, for that I will *never* believe unless convinced with my own eyes. Such terrible fears as to his fate come across me sometimes."

"My poor child, you must not allow any fancies to get the better of your reason,"

said her mother, drawing her tenderly to her side.

It was the first time Ethel had spoken to her mother on the subject since the first few sad days, and the result of unburdening her mind to her was certainly beneficial, for she seemed more cheerful after the conversation than she had been for some time.

The sorrow was not sent in vain ; and from that day Ethel endeavoured to be more resigned, relying on a Higher Strength than her own. She felt she still had something to live for, and in trying to make others happy she became happier herself. Mrs. Allington noticed the change in her with thankful feelings ; perhaps Colonel Allington did not feel so satisfied on finding she did not regain her former high spirits ; but the mother saw that the change proceeded from deeper feelings, and felt almost thankful for the trial which had been the means of producing it in her child's heart.

CHAPTER IX.

THEY proceeded from Saltzburgh to Ischl, where Mary, Mabel, and Granville were to leave them to return to England. As Ethel appeared so much better for the change, her parents arranged to remain abroad a month longer. Many were the lamentations of Mabel and Granville as their holidays drew to a close. They determined to make the most of the time remaining, and by way of doing so ascended the Schaffberg one day, sleeping the night on the top and returning the next. Another day they made an expedition to some salt mines, which proved a very amusing adventure. On arriving at the entrance they had to retire to put on miner's costume. As they all issued forth in their novel attire they had a hearty laugh at the appearance they presented. Then they all mounted on chairs fastened to a piece of wood, and entered a tunnel, which led to an opening resembling a well, where

a slide of wood was fixed that went down into darkness ; they were desired to get on this plank, each one holding on to a guide, and so slide down into the mine. Mabel and her brother were delighted at this novel mode of travelling. They went through a few chambers, and were informed how the salt was obtained, and after two more slides were again mounted on chairs and shot into daylight.

Both Mabel and Granville declared that this was the most delightful excursion they had had, and, as it was their last, it was a fortunate conclusion to come to.

The following day the two girls and their brother started for Ostend, where Colonel Allington, who accompanied them, put them on board the steamer, and they were to meet Mademoiselle Chevrier at Dover, and return to Melville with her, while Granville went back to Eton. They went off in very good spirits, considering the delights they were leaving. Granville said he considered Ethel a very lucky girl, and declared his

intention of being delicate next time he went abroad. The party left behind was a very quiet one. On the Colonel's return they proceeded to Dresden, staying at Vienna for a short time on their way.

The Picture Gallery at Dresden is always one of the first places visited, and accordingly our party went there the first morning after their arrival. They made their way towards the room where the gem of the collection is kept—Raphael's "Madonna di San Sisto;" and as Ethel was feeling rather tired, her parents left her still gazing at the picture, while they went on to see some others.

Many people came in and out, but their remarks fell unheeded on Ethel's ear, for she was fully absorbed in the beautiful painting before her. The thought passed through her mind that the sweet face of the Madonna was looking sad and almost reproachful, as if she were saying, "Why do ye give me the homage that is due to my Son alone?" Her thoughts were

suddenly interrupted by the sound of a voice—a voice that she had never expected to hear on earth again, the tone of which she could never forget or mistake. Oh, the agony of that moment! Was then that terrible report indeed true? She could bear the suspense no longer, she must discover the worst. With an effort she turned round, and her eyes met those of the speaker. She sprang up from the couch with a smothered scream, and the next moment was lying senseless at his feet.

Lord Trevor, for it was he, turned deadly pale and started back; quickly recovering himself however on finding that Ethel's cry had drawn every one's attention from the picture to themselves, he stooped down, and, raising her in his arms, carried her from the room, through the Italian school of painting, and finally placed his burden on a sort of couch near the entrance, and looking round to see what could be done next, he saw Colonel and Mrs. Allington approaching. They had heard rather a com-

motion, and being told that some one had fainted, an indefinable sense of dread came over Mrs. Allington, and they both hurried in the direction of the stream of people who were following Lord Trevor. It was with a feeling of relief, Percy Trevor advanced to them, but rather to his surprise, Mrs. Allington hurried past him without a glance of recognition, and went to Ethel. But he was still more surprised when Colonel Allington, striding up to him, asked in an indignant tone what he did with his daughter, and hinted that the sooner he was gone the better.

“What does this mean, Colonel Allington? Have I done anything to incur your displeasure? If——”

He was interrupted by Mrs. Allington coming up to her husband to ask him to procure a carriage as quickly as possible, as by this time they had become the centre of quite a little crowd, some offering their services and others only looking on from curiosity.

Then, for the first time, Mrs. Allington

became aware of Lord Trevor's presence ; for the moment she seemed quite bewildered, and almost unconsciously held out her hand to him. He was about to grasp it, but a second thought made him draw himself back haughtily as he said, "No, not until this mystery be cleared, and Colonel Allington has explained himself."

Then glancing at Ethel his hauteur disappeared, and he added hastily, "But can I do anything for you, or get a carriage?"

Colonel Allington had already started in quest of one, so finding he could do nothing more, Lord Trevor turned again to Mrs. Allington, saying, "Here is my address. I do not understand all this, but let me beg of you not to keep me long in this suspense, only tell me how I have offended you. I will now relieve you of my presence."

Mrs. Allington mechanically took the card held out to her, and read the address ; when she looked up Lord Trevor was gone.

Colonel Allington soon reappeared and carried Ethel to the carriage. The hotel was not far off, and on reaching it Mrs.

Allington and her maid were not long in restoring Ethel to consciousness.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Ethel at last opened her eyes she looked round the room, evidently searching for some one. Then raising her hand to her head she said faintly,

“Where is Percy? was he not with me? I thought I was in the picture gallery.”

“So you were, my child, but you fainted, and so we brought you back to the hotel.”

“But mother, where is Percy? oh, do not keep me away from him. I know I saw him and the beautiful Madonna at the same time. It was not a dream—oh, say it was not a dream!” she exclaimed passionately.

“Hush, Ethel,” said her mother authoritatively. “You must lie quite still, and not try to think or excite yourself. You cannot see him directly. Now I must leave you for a short time, and go to speak to

your father." And kissing her tenderly Mrs. Allington left the room.

Colonel Allington was pacing up and down the sitting-room, his usual habit when vexed or perplexed about anything. On his wife's entrance he approached her, and leading her to a seat, inquired how Ethel was.

"She is conscious, and wishing to see Lord Trevor," replied Mrs. Allington.

Her husband frowned, and was about to reply. But before he could do so Mrs. Allington, placing the address she had received in his hand, said: "I think it is our duty to sift this matter to the bottom, Granville, laying aside all pride, for our child's happiness depends on it." And she looked imploringly into her husband's face.

"I thought the matter had been decided, before we came abroad, by that paragraph in the *Times*."

"Yet I can scarcely believe it of him, now I have seen him; and besides he was *alone*. Granville, you have never yet denied me anything which I have desired very earn-

estly. Oh, do not let this be the first time, for I feel convinced there is a mistake somewhere. Go to this address, and have at least an explanation from Lord Trevor, for if this be not cleared up satisfactorily, I shall begin to fear the worst for Ethel." Her pleading at last gained a reluctant consent from the colonel.

It was with a throbbing heart Mrs. Allington saw him depart, and it seemed hours waiting for his return. She thought it better not to go to Ethel before the suspense should be over. She waited and watched, trying to school herself to bear another disappointment.

At last footsteps were heard approaching the door. It opened, and her husband entered, and with him—could it be? Yes, it was indeed Lord Trevor! A sudden sensation of joy came over Mrs. Allington, and for the moment she could not move. She felt from their countenances that all must be right, and glanced inquiringly at them.

"Yes, dearest," said her husband, advancing to her, "it is all cleared. I have

been blindly unjust to Lord Trevor. I have asked and obtained his forgiveness, and now the best way of making amends to him and Ethel will be to let them see one another as soon as possible. Her faith has never wavered in you," he added turning to his companion.

Mrs. Allington's heart was raised in thankfulness to Him who had restored to them this happiness. And then, turning to Lord Trevor, she asked him to explain how the mistake had occurred.

"It is a long story," replied Lord Trevor. "But how is Ethel? May I not tell her at the same time?"

"Certainly," answered Mrs. Allington, "but I had better prepare her first. She is not very strong, and I am afraid of any shock of joy or grief for her."

But Ethel did not need much preparation—for her ear had caught the sound of that voice so well known to her, even while she had been in a light sleep. And when her mother entered she was sitting on the sofa, with a bright colour and sparkling eyes, in eager expectation.

"She is waiting for you," said Mrs. Allington, returning.

Lord Trevor did not need a second bidding, but hurried eagerly into the next room. Mrs. Allington softly closed the door, feeling that the meeting between these two was too sacred even for her eyes to witness.

Returning to her husband she begged to know by what unfortunate mistake so unlucky a paragraph had come under their notice.

"It was the cousin who accompanied him abroad, whose marriage we saw in the paper; strangely enough all the elder sons of the family of Trevor are christened Percy. It was, indeed, a most unfortunate mistake, and deeply thankful do I feel that I have been spared the consequences of my rash judgment."

"But his silence?" inquired Mrs. Allington.

"He has only now escaped from the hands of brigands; but I do not as yet know any particulars, he must tell us himself.

He was so anxious to see and explain it all to Ethel, I could not refuse to bring him here at once. He is a noble, generous young fellow, and I am grieved I should have doubted him for a moment."

After a time, which though sufficiently long to the Colonel and Mrs. Allington, appeared very short to the happy couple in the other room, the mother, fearing too much excitement for Ethel's delicate health, proposed that they should join them. It was then that Lord Trevor was prevailed on to relate the adventures that he had before hinted.

CHAPTER XI.

THEY were, as Lord Trevor had told Ethel in his last letter, waiting to join a party, as the mountains they were about to cross were noted for being the hiding place of a party of brigands, and it was not considered safe for a small party to venture alone. The latter piece of in-

formation he had not written, for fear of unnecessarily giving alarm.

His cousin was impatient to proceed, as his wedding was to take place on the opposite side of the ridge. He was engaged to an Italian contessa, and had accompanied Lord Trevor abroad for the purpose of being married. If this had only been mentioned in the letter, how much trouble might have been avoided.

They soon heard of another small party who wished to venture, and determined to join them. They were to spend one night on the mountains, and every arrangement was made for camping out. In such a warm climate, at that time of the year, sleeping under canvas made a pleasant change. They arrived at the point where they had settled to pitch their tent, and while supper was being prepared, Lord Trevor and his cousin agreed to start off in order to see some beautiful scenery at no great distance from their encampment, and which ought to be viewed by moonlight. Everything seemed propitious for the undertaking, and

the moon shone brightly ; they argued no harm could befall them, as they could easily fall back on their party if alarmed. They accordingly took their guns and set out for the spot, which they reached in safety, and its beauty fully repaid them their trouble. On returning to retrace their steps, the moon became suddenly hid by a passing cloud ; they hoped, nevertheless, to find their way back ; but in this they were mistaken, for when the moon again reappeared they found themselves in a sort of narrow gorge, where there was only room for one to walk at a time. Lord Trevor was in front. As soon as he found they were on the wrong track, he turned back to consult with his companion, when the sound of a gun, fired off close at hand, made them both start, and before they had time to retreat they heard voices.

“ We must run for it or we are lost,” whispered Lord Trevor. “ If the moon keeps out we may find our way back to the encampment.”

They both began to run as hard as they

could in the opposite direction from which the sounds came, knowing resistance would be useless.

By this time they distinctly heard footsteps and voices behind them; and just as they were turning a sudden bend in the narrow footway, the young lord felt himself seized from behind and dragged away. Fortunately for his companion, the moon again disappeared behind a cloud, which enabled him unseen to escape Lord Trevor's fate, and he found his way back to his party. He informed them of what had occurred, and entreated them to pursue and recover his cousin from his captors; but the few soldiers who had accompanied them, and who were certainly not of the bravest, declared they were not enough in number to attempt anything like an attack on the brigands, whom they evidently held in great awe. They urged going on at once to the nearest town, and giving information to the authorities there; but they gave little hope of his ever hearing of his cousin again. The Earl of Melton was instantly communicated with,

and the letter had been forwarded to the Heaths, who had enclosed it to Colonel Allington. The latter, as we have seen, rashly committed this important clue to the mystery of the flames. But to return to Lord Trevor. After he had been captured he was carried some distance blindfolded, and when his eyes were unbound he found himself surrounded by a group of rough-looking men, evidently commanded by a leader, who was dressed a little better than the rest, and who had given orders for a halt.

A dead silence was kept while a coil of rope was produced, which was tied round the waist of one of the men and the other end made fast to a tree. The man was then let down over the edge of a precipice which they were close to; the rope was presently drawn up again, and another man let down in the same fashion, and then another, and another, until only Lord Trevor, his jailor, and the captain were left. The latter spoke some words in Italian to the man who held Lord Trevor, then the noose

was thrown over his head and shoulders, drawn tight round his waist, and he was led to the side of the precipice and motioned to let himself over. In another moment he was swinging in mid air. The horror of that instant he could never forget. Was he about to be hurried into eternity? Was he prepared to meet his God? Such questions forced themselves on him as they had never done before. While he was endeavouring to form a prayer he felt his feet seized and himself drawn into a hollow opening about midway down the precipice. He was then disengaged from the rope, and on looking round he found himself in a huge cavern, surrounded by the men who had captured him; there was no necessity for securing him there, as escape was impossible. When the remaining two had descended, they all began dividing their ill-gotten spoil with a great deal of noise and quarrelling. The leader appeared to exercise great authority over the men. There were women in the cave preparing the meal. One, whom Percy

supposed was the chief's wife, was standing apart from the rest and listening very attentively to something her husband was saying to her. When he had finished she advanced to Lord Trevor, telling him in Italian to follow her; he obeyed, having no other alternative. She led him to the further end of the cavern, which was but dimly lighted by a rude oil lamp burning before an image of the Virgin. Pointing to a recess she told him to remain there, and that if he made any attempt at escape he would be thrown over the precipice. With this cheerful piece of information she left him.

From his position Percy Trevor could observe all that was going on in the centre of the cavern. The supper lasted far into the night, the brigands singing songs and making a deafening noise until they all at last sank into a drunken sleep, when their captive, tired out with the perils and excitement of the day, and feeling thankful he was still alive, closed his eyes also.

CHAPTER XII.

THE following morning Lord Trevor was rudely awakened by a rough shake, and then found himself being searched by the captain. His gun had been taken from him when he was first captured, and now his purse and a few trifles were seized. A small Italian Testament that he happened to have about him was contemptuously thrown aside, which he quietly picked up and returned to his pocket as soon as he was left alone.

The men then made a hasty breakfast, and prepared for another expedition. A little boy, who was evidently the chief's son, dressed like his father, in miniature, was brought forward, and a rope tied round his waist. He was then hoisted on the shoulders of one of the men; and grasping a projecting rock at the top of the entrance, he quickly disappeared. Percy shuddered, but the little fellow seemed to

think nothing of it, brought up as he had been to feats of daring from his babyhood. He scrambled up the rugged precipice like a monkey, finding a footing on narrow ledges where no full-grown man could possibly have rested ; when he gained the top he secured the rope tightly to a tree, and then let down the noose, which one of the men took and fastening it round him, managed the ascent by its aid. Another one followed his example, and the rest were drawn up by those already at the top. When all had ascended, the boy was let down again. The women and children now began to make their breakfast from what the men had left. Lord Trevor was graciously permitted to do the same, on condition that he made himself useful, which he was glad to do. They set to work to clear away all vestiges of the night's carousal, and lit fires in order to prepare a meal against the men's return. When they had finished, Lord Trevor sat down and took out his Testament, thinking he should have need of all the comfort he could find there, for it was unlikely he

would ever leave that place alive. He had not read long before he heard a voice at his side, and turning, saw the chief's wife. She seemed very interested in looking at the book he held in his hands, and was anxious he should read some of it to her. She told him she used to read before she came to that place ; she had been captured from her cottage home when a girl of sixteen, and on account of her beauty and courage had been honoured by being made the captain's wife.

Percy Trevor explained what book he was reading. On inquiry he found she had a very hazy idea of religion, the Virgin Mary being the principal part of her creed. She seemed to like hearing him read and explain it to her, although she could not be made to understand that a robber's life was sinful. She appeared to have taken a great fancy to the handsome youth who was beguiling some of the weary time she passed during the absence of the men ; she told him in great confidence that they were going to try and get a ransom for him, but that if it

did not arrive before a fortnight had passed, he was to be hurled down the precipice.

He asked her if her little boy performed the perilous feat of the morning every day.

She said that the rope was generally left suspended, but if there was any danger of pursuit, it was taken down ; and then only the boy's services were required.

A few days passed, during which Lord Trevor was treated with apparent indifference by the men, but his reading and talking still continued with the robber's wife. And she began to look forward to the time after the breakfast was over, and the morning duties dispensed with, when she could bring her work and sit down by Percy's side as he read.

Rather more than a week after his capture, she told him nothing had been heard of his ransom, but still she held out hopes of his safety ; he could never understand her when she spoke of this, as her manner was so mysterious.

Two or three days after she had given him the above information, she came to

him with an agitated manner, and said, "Tell me, is it wrong to break a vow for a good cause?"

Percy Trevor was puzzled how to answer, and said he could not judge unless she told him more of the circumstances of the case.

"I should not have hesitated before you came," she continued; "but since you have read to me about the kind God and His Son Jesus, I have given up many things I never used to think wrong. But I will tell you my secret now, lest the inclination to do so should pass away. It is decided that in three days you are to be killed unless something is heard of your ransom before that time is passed, as they say you are of no use and only eat our bread. But mark! I can save you, though if it be discovered I shall share the fate intended for you. I have already incurred my husband's displeasure by pleading for you. There is a secret passage known only to my husband and myself by which we can reach the top of the mountain; if you escape I and my son will bid this place a final adieu."

Tears came into her eyes as she spoke of leaving the cave which had so long been a home to her.

Lord Trevor gazed on her with admiration. He felt very thankful that his teaching had not been lost on her, and thanked her again and again for her heroic resolve to save him at the risk of her life and loss of her home. He questioned her closely as to her motives for leaving her husband, and if she had quite made up her mind to do so.

She drew her beautiful head up proudly, and with flashing eyes replied, "I am resolved. I wish to be a Christian; how can I live as one in such a place as this, where God's laws are broken every day? But if we talk any longer we may be suspected; read to me now, and breathe not a word of what has passed."

As he closed the book, and was thanking her again for the risk she was running for his safety, she stopped him, saying, "You owe me nothing, I owe you everything, for if ever I reach heaven you will have been my guide."

She then left him to his own thoughts, which were more cheerful than any he had indulged in since his capture. He now saw that he had not been brought to that place in vain—that there had been a work for him to do there, and now that it had been accomplished by a Higher Power than his alone, he believed he was to be saved.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE following night Lord Trevor was awakened soon after he had fallen asleep by a gentle pressure, and on opening his eyes he saw by the dim light the outline of a woman bending over him. The scene appeared almost supernatural. All around the rough rugged wall of rock, opposite him the figure of the Virgin lighted by the dull oil lamp, the robber's wife, dressed in the fantastic fashion of her country, standing near, while in the middle of the cavern the brigands were lying about, some on the rude table and others on the floor.

But no time could be spared for reflection, so with a hasty prayer he followed the woman, who went to the figure opposite, and turning round pushed a sleeping boy into Lord Trevor's arms, then pulling aside the folds of the skirt of the image, motioned him to hide under them and push with her against the wall behind; presently what appeared to be solid rock began to move; they still pushed on until it suddenly sank into a pit prepared for it behind. Stepping over it they found themselves in a narrow passage, with no light except that which came through the skirt of the figure, which hid the aperture from the view of those within the cave.

As they hurried rapidly over the rough ground, the boy awoke, and was told by his mother to follow them without speaking. Gradually the path began to ascend, which made their progress slower and more difficult. At last a gleam of moonlight fell across their way, and they found to their joy they had reached the opening, which was concealed by a rock and some brambles.

They succeeded in pushing the rock far enough away to allow them to pass, and Percy gave a sigh of relief on finding himself once more breathing the free air of heaven.

But they were not yet safe, so only giving themselves a few moments to rest, they hurried on, anxious to reach some place of safety before the day broke and the robbers should have discovered their escape.

They continued their course, which was a difficult one, out of the usual track of mountaineers, and swinging themselves down perilous places, until they reached a pathway which led them to the foot of the mountain. Just then the sun began to rise ; it was a glorious sight, the mountain tops all bathed in the light of the golden dawn.

Our fugitives, however, had no time to stop and admire the scene ; they went on through some mountain pasture land, not venturing to ask for shelter at a small cottage they passed ; deeming it prudent to go on further, they pursued their way with wearied steps but thankful hearts. In a short time they saw the welcome forms of

some mountaineers, whom they stopped in order to ask where they might find a house to rest in. The men good-naturedly turned back to lead them to one not far off. They did not remain long under the hospitable roof which afforded them a shelter, as they were anxious to reach a town before night.

It seemed very strange to the robber's wife to be once more wandering about at will, and it was difficult to make the boy understand the why and wherefore of his mother's flight, but he thoroughly enjoyed the change of scene, having never been far from the cavern before.

They succeeded in reaching a town before night set in, where their only resource was to go at once to the officials and state their case, as they had no money. They told their story, but the brigand's wife had made Lord Trevor promise not to reveal her husband's retreat; indeed he could hardly have described it if he had wished to, so intricate was the path by which they had fled.

He tried to discover if his cousin was still in the town, and where the relations of his

bride lived, and as they were influential people he did not find much trouble in doing this. They were delighted to see him and take him in, having heard about him from his cousin. His first anxiety was to telegraph at once to his father and Ethel, who had never been absent from his thoughts all the time of his captivity. The telegram to Colonel Allington had unfortunately arrived soon after they had left for abroad; it was sent to them with other letters in a packet that had never reached them, having been sent to Trèves the day they left, and had not been forwarded. Colonel Allington had never heard of it, and this happened to have been the only missive of importance in it.

Lord Trevor was of course anxious to return as soon as possible to England, to see those dearest to him again, but he felt it a duty, having been the means of depriving the poor Italian girl of her husband and home, to find out her parents, if still living, and settle her in another home.

After some time and trouble he succeeded

in tracking her parents, who had removed to another part, some miles away. They were overjoyed at receiving their long lost daughter, whom they had mourned for as dead, back to their arms. He only waited to handsomely reward his benefactress, and assure himself of her safety and happiness, before he started for England. The brigand's wife said she would hope and pray that her husband might be restored to her, not as an outlaw, but as a penitent man, and until then she would live at home, a comfort to her parents in their declining age, and devote herself to the training of her son, who should, like herself, be a Protestant. Whether her prayers were ever fulfilled, Lord Trevor never knew, for, though he made inquiries about her in after years, he could never discover anything more about her, and it was believed they had changed their residence for one farther away from the haunts of the brigands.

He went first, on his arrival in England, to his father, and then as soon as possible down to Melville, surprised at receiving no

answer to his telegram, and determined to go in person rather than write. He found a deserted house there, of course, and going on to his cousins, the Heaths, in great disappointment, to inquire where the family had gone, found they knew no more of their movements than himself; he returned to ask the servants left at Melville the question. With difficulty he at last discovered that they were at Ischl, gone there for Miss Ethel's health. His impatience to see her knew no bounds, so, sending a telegram to his father, he set off the next morning, on the shortest route to Ischl; but here, poor fellow, he was again doomed to disappointment, for on inquiry at the Hotel Bauer, where the Allingtons had stayed, he found they had left a few days before. In despair he followed them to Vienna; not succeeding in finding them in this city, he was about to return to England in despair, when a letter arrived from the Heaths, saying they had heard from Mabel Allington, who had returned home, that Ethel and her parents had gone to Dresden. With fresh hope

he again renewed his search, this time, as we have seen, successfully.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next day Lord Trevor moved into the same hotel as the Allingtons.

Colonel Allington told his wife and Percy Trevor how he had destroyed the letter, and wrote to Mr. Heath stating the facts, and giving his reasons for the coolness shown him before their departure for the continent.

In a few days they all started for England. Mrs. Allington was doubly anxious to reach home, as the account of Mabel's conduct she had received lately was anything but satisfactory; she evidently required a mother's watchful authority.

At Dover Lord Trevor parted from them to return to his father, who was anxious to have his son with him, having scarcely

seen him since the peril he had passed through.

It was some time before Ethel could settle down to studies again, and just as she was beginning to fall into the usual routine an invitation arrived from Lord Melton for her and her parents to go to his house in London, as he was anxious to become acquainted with his son's choice. The visit was put off until the Christmas holidays, as they wished Ethel to devote herself to study while she could. One afternoon, about a fortnight after their return from abroad, Mrs. Allington took the two elder girls for a drive, while Mabel had accompanied mademoiselle to the neighbouring little town of Craggsford to do some shopping. As mademoiselle was making a purchase in the only linendraper's shop the place afforded, she suddenly missed Mabel from her side, and on going to the door to look for her she saw her in the act of saying good-bye to a gentleman whose face mademoiselle could not see.

“Who was that? Why did you not tell

me you were going to speak to some one?" were the questions asked as Mabel returned to her governess.

Mabel gave a little start at finding her so near, and replied with a heightened colour,

"I did not think it worth while, mademoiselle. I was only speaking to a gentleman; I know you would not wish me to be so rude as to take no notice of him."

Her governess looked at her steadily.

"I do not consider that at all a satisfactory explanation, to say the least of it. It was not at all nice in a young lady to rush out of a shop to speak to a gentleman whose name she chooses to make a mystery. You know, Mabel, if I were to tell Mrs. Allington of your conduct lately, how seriously displeased she would be."

"Really, mademoiselle, what a fuss you are making about nothing at all. You are most welcome to know who I was speaking to; it was Captain Danvers: does that satisfy you?"

But it did not satisfy the governess, who

determined to tell the whole transaction to Mrs. Allington, and so shift the responsibility from her shoulders, and she told Mabel so. Mabel pretended to be quite indifferent, but the rest of the day she was very silent, an unusual thing for her.

Mademoiselle took the first opportunity of telling Mrs. Allington of Mabel's behaviour. The mother did not think much of it, knowing as she did her child's thoughtless impetuosity. But she determined to tell Mabel to be more guarded in her conduct another time.

Mabel listened to her mother's lecture very quietly, and ended by hugging her and promising to try and not shock mademoiselle's feelings again.

Mrs. Allington, however, determined to watch her with more scrutiny than before.

Once she had reason to feel this watchfulness was needed. It was at a musical party they gave a few weeks after the incident related above. Captain Danvers was there, and payed Mabel a good deal of attention. They were sitting together

on a sofa at the further end of the room. Mabel had a photograph book on her lap, and Captain Danvers laid his hand on a photograph, evidently wishing to have it; Mabel, however, shook her head. He still insisted, she held it tightly, and even stamped in her anxiety. But finally she yielded.

Mrs. Allington, thinking it quite time to put an end to this little *tête-à-tête*, advanced to them, asking Captain Danvers to sing.

It was in vain that Mrs. Allington tried to sustain her interest in the conversation addressed to her during the rest of that evening. Her thoughts would wander away to Mabel. If she began in this way when she was so young, what would she be when grown up? It seemed almost useless to speak seriously to her, for she always turned it off, and no impression appeared to be made.

CHAPTER XV.

As the two younger girls were busy in the school-room with their studies the following

morning, a knock came at the door, and a footman entered with a message that Mrs. Allington wished to speak to Miss Mabel.

For almost the first time in her life Mabel dreaded going to her mother. On entering the room she found her seated by a writing table, with an open album beside her.

Mabel turned pale, and Mrs. Allington looked up.

"I wanted to speak to you, Mabel. Sit down, dear, you look so pale, do you feel ill?"

"No, thank you, mamma," and the bright colour rushed back again to her cheeks.

"Then, Mabel, can you account for this? I put one of your photographs loose inside your book, but I find it is not here now; where is it gone?"

"I am very sorry, mamma, but, but I— gave it away. I suppose I can do what I like with my own things," Mabel added, in a half-defiant tone.

Mrs. Allington looked up in astonish-

ment, scarcely believing it possible she could receive such an answer from one of her children.

"Mabel, have you forgotten yourself? This from you! Remember for the future you are not to do what *you* like with your things, but what *I* like."

Mrs. Allington was grieved to be obliged to speak sternly, but in this case she felt it her duty.

Mabel had buried her face in the cushion of the couch on which she had seated herself, and was now sobbing bitterly.

"Mabel, I desire you to answer my question. To whom did you give your photograph?"

Still there was no answer, and Mrs. Allington spoke again—

"This is the first time any one of my children has resisted my authority. If you still refuse to answer me, I must ask your father to come, and I think you will not dare to disobey him."

"Mother, forgive me," Mabel exclaimed ;

"I must have been mad to speak as I did to you."

Mrs. Allington crossed the room to Mabel's side on hearing the first word of penitence, saying, "I forgive you those words, my child, painful as they were to me. Only tell me everything, believe me I do all for your good. Be your own straightforward self again, and do not hide anything from me."

To Mrs. Allington's surprise Mabel fell down on her knees before her, and seizing her hands said in an imploring tone, "Only say you will still love me if I do not tell you to whom I gave the photograph."

"I can never cease to love you, however much your conduct may grieve me; but, Mabel, why do you wish to deceive me? Did you not give your photograph to Captain Danvers last night?"

Mabel started.

"You know then! You saw! Oh why did you not tell me so?"

"Because I wished to see if my Mabel had sufficient candour to confess it herself."

I cannot express the pain it has caused me to find this is not the case. I need not say that I cannot allow you to give anything to any gentleman without first referring to me. I do not know how far matters have gone between you and Captain Danvers, but it is my duty to put a stop to any intimacy at once. Remember you are not to speak to him again except in the presence of your father, governess, or me. You may now return to your studies, if you have nothing more to say to me."

To Mrs. Allington's disappointment, Mabel rose and left the room without speaking. After she was gone her mother bent her head on her hand, while painful thoughts passed through her mind. She felt deeply grieved at her child's want of confidence in her, and she feared that the strict discipline she would be obliged to enforce would yet further alienate the mother and daughter. She would have wished to put off the visit to London, which would take place in a few weeks, that she might keep a watchful eye on

Mabel, but this could not easily be managed, as the visit was a long-promised one, and could not well be postponed.

CHAPTER XVI.

NOTHING more had been said on the subject of the photograph, and Mabel and her mother were almost on the same terms as before, when the time arrived for the long-looked-for visit to the Earl of Melton—Ethel's first visit to London.

Christmas had passed, and the new year begun, when one bitterly cold morning Colonel and Mrs. Allington, with Ethel enveloped in furs, were seated in a comfortable first-class railway carriage, whirling away to the busy metropolis. Arrived at their destination, they found Lord Trevor, with the Earl's carriage, waiting for them.

Ethel was in a tumult of happiness, though not unmixed with a feeling of dread, as each moment brought her nearer to Percy's father. Suppose he should be

disappointed in her, he would be sure to think her not good enough to be his son's wife. These and similar thoughts passed through Ethel's mind, until they were suddenly brought to a conclusion by the carriage drawing up in a fashionable part of Belgravia. The footman alighted, and running up the steps of one of the noble mansions surrounding them, pealed the bell, which was immediately answered by a footman, followed by a grey-haired butler. Ethel followed her parents through the splendid hall, and into a spacious room in great trepidation. Her fears were partially relieved when an old gentleman came forward, shaking hands with them in a courteous manner, hoping they had not found it very cold travelling, etc. She hardly dared raise her eyes, and felt thankful when the housekeeper appeared to show them to their rooms. Ethel found Marie already in the room prepared for her, unpacking her young mistress' wardrobe.

She was sitting by the fire dressed for dinner, when a knock came at the door, and

she heard Percy's voice outside, asking if she were ready. She ran to the door, showing him she was, and he escorted her downstairs.

The Earl was sitting at the library fire, reading a paper, when the fair vision of his future daughter-in-law appeared, led by his son. He had scarcely seen her before, and now her exquisite loveliness struck him for the first time. Her fair complexion, dark expressive eyes, and graceful figure, all combined to make him feel little surprise that his son's heart had been captivated.

Lord Trevor drew Ethel towards his father, who placed a chair for her near his own. At first she was rather shy, but this soon wore off, and by the time Colonel and Mrs. Allington were shown into the room, she was chatting away merrily, while Percy stood close by, watching her animated features with delight.

In a few days the Allingtons were quite at home at Lord Melton's. Ethel created no small stir among the Earl's acquaintances, both from her youth and beauty.

“A mere child, with nothing but a pretty face to recommend her,” was the remark of many disappointed matrons, who had looked on Lord Trevor as a desirable match for one of their daughters.

The Earl was evidently very proud of his future daughter-in-law, and insisted on her going to parties and operas, and in fact making her *début* in the fashionable world. He was very anxious for the wedding to take place in the spring, arguing that the sooner the better, and after all the young people had gone through it was evident they knew their own minds. In fact, he had taken a great fancy to Ethel, and did not at all like the idea of parting with her. The house would seem so different without her bright presence. It was the first time a lady had stayed there since the death of Percy's mother, about ten years previously. After a great deal of persuasion Colonel and Mrs. Allington gave their consent.

Three weeks passed rapidly away, and at the end of that time Ethel and her parents returned home. Mrs. Allington

was anxious to keep a watch over Mabel's conduct again, and she did not return too soon.

They arrived in the evening rather earlier than they were expected. As the carriage drew up at the door, Mary came out to welcome them, and after the first greetings were over, Mrs. Allington inquired eagerly for Mabel. Mary did not know where she was, and the servants believed she had gone out.

Mrs. Allington became uneasy, and reproached herself for being absent so long. For Mabel to be out at night by herself was such an extraordinary thing.

In twenty minutes Marie came to say that Miss Mabel had returned, and on hearing that her parents had come home had hastened to her room.

Mrs. Allington sent her word that she was in her sitting-room, and wished to see her.

A very unsatisfactory interview between Mabel and her mother ensued. At first Mabel tried to behave as if nothing

had happened, but on being questioned as to the cause of her absence, blushed, hesitated, and finally burst into tears. Her mother soothed her, and begged her to say what distressed her. It was all in vain, Mabel would not tell. One thing she affirmed, and that was that she had not spoken to Captain Danvers in private during her parents' absence.

"Why will you persist in making both yourself and me miserable by this concealment?" said Mrs. Allington.

Still no response, and the mother, finding that the more she said the more Mabel sobbed, rose, telling her she had better lie down on the sofa, and her dinner should be sent to her.

"But papa will want to know why," exclaimed Mabel.

"Of course he must hear of this evening's proceedings," said Mrs. Allington gravely. "If you refuse to account to me for your absence, your father must use his authority. I cannot allow this to pass without his knowledge."

But neither threats nor pleadings had any effect on Mabel. She obstinately refused to reveal her errand on that night. Her parents were seriously concerned about her, and determined not to leave her at home to her own devices again.

There was certainly a mystery about Mabel, even Ethel could not make her out. And so the holidays passed, and everyone felt relieved when mademoiselle returned.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE wedding had been fixed for the nineteenth of April, and as the time approached the whole village of Craggsford became excited at the thought of the coming festivities.

Melville House was full, and the little Devonshire inn had never before received such distinguished visitors as on the night before Miss Allington's wedding.

Lord Melton and his son were at the Heaths', but their friends were quartered,

to the infinite satisfaction of mine host, at the Red Lion.

Long that night did Mrs. Allington and her daughter sit together, neither feeling able to tear herself away. Yet the mother felt she could part with her precious child more cheerfully now than she could have done six months previously, for she knew that Ethel now possessed the peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

The morning proved to be everything that could be desired, as far as the weather was concerned.

It was not with unmingled happiness that Ethel gazed from her window on the scene so familiar to her eye for the last time in her short unmarried life. She was soon joined by Mabel, and together the two sisters remained with their arms passed round each other, neither speaking for some time, but each engaged with her own thoughts. Marie presently appeared, bringing a little tray with their breakfast.

There was not much time for sad thoughts,

as the wedding was to take place before eleven ; all the house was in excitement. The important business of dressing soon began. There were to be eight bridesmaids, Mary and Mabel of course, and the clergyman's daughter ; some cousins of the bride and bridegroom completed the number, dressed in pale blue and white and pink and white alternately.

The carriages began to assemble and visitors and bridesmaids were conveyed to the church, which was crowded, and all were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the bride. At last she appeared, and very pure and lovely she looked in her bridal white, as leaning on her father's arm she passed up the aisle. Her eyes were bent on the ground ; and only the trembling of her small hand, which rested on Colonel Allington's arm, and her extreme paleness, betrayed the emotion she felt.

At last the service was concluded, and Ethel signed her name as Allington for the last time.

Percy Trevor conducted his now blush-

ing bride down the aisle to the church porch. The school children lined each side of the path from the church door to the carriage, and as the newly-married couple passed, strewed spring flowers on their way.

The wedding breakfast was broken up by the departure of the bride and bridegroom, *en route* for Switzerland and Italy. The evening was concluded by a ball. The poor people and children had been provided for by a dinner and tea in the grounds during the afternoon.

When all the excitement was over, and the guests returned to their respective homes, Ethel's loss began to be felt. Mabel especially missed her, although she found a companion in Granville while he was at home; but the holidays soon came to an end, and he was obliged to return to school and Mabel to her studies, which were very solitary now, as Mary was quite her mother's companion.

They heard constantly from Lord and Lady Trevor, most happy letters, saying how different this travelling on the con-

continent was to what the last had been ; they talked of returning to England in June, when they intended to pay Melville a visit before taking possession of the house and grounds the Earl had provided for them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MABEL'S conduct continued to give her parents great anxiety. At times she was as lively as ever, and at others irritable and fretful.

One morning about a week before the bride and bridegroom were expected from the continent, as Colonel Allington was distributing the letters from the post-bag, he came across one for Mabel in a strange handwriting.

"Who is your correspondent?" he said, before giving it to her, and watching her attentively.

Mabel coloured crimson, as she felt all eyes turned on her, and murmured, "How

should I know before I have opened it? give it to me, please."

She held out her hand for it, but it trembled so, she was obliged to drop it.

"Well, there it is," and her father threw it over to her.

"You may open and read it here," said Mrs. Allington quietly, as Mabel was about to leave the room.

Mabel turned pale, but she obeyed her mother's directions.

"Well," said Mrs. Allington, as she finished reading it, "who is it from?"

Mabel made no answer.

"Do you hear your mother speaking to you?" said Colonel Allington sternly; "answer her immediately."

"I cannot," said Mabel faintly.

"Cannot? what does this mean?" asked her father. "Give your mother the letter to read directly;" and he rose and advanced towards her.

Mabel looked round wildly, then rushing to the mantle-shelf, seized the match-box, struck a light, and in another minute the

letter was reduced to ashes. Without waiting to see the effect of her desperate act she ran out of the room.

The dismay caused in the breakfast-room can better be imagined than described. Mary and mademoiselle left the room while Mrs. Allington and her husband held a long consultation. At last the Colonel took his hat and went out of the house, and Mrs. Allington went up to Mabel's room. The door was locked, but on Mrs. Allington claiming admittance, it was opened by Mabel.

While the mother and daughter are together, we will endeavour to explain Mabel's conduct, which was so mysterious to her parents. On her return from abroad Mary and she, with their governess, had been invited to a good many luncheon and garden parties; it was at one of these that she first met Captain Danvers, whose regiment was quartered not far off. He, struck by her pretty face and lively manner, made her an offer after they had met a few times. Mabel, who we must remember was only

sixteen, flattered by his attentions would have accepted him at once, but she wished to wait for her parents' consent. This he would not hear of, and said that if she accepted him it must be under a promise of secrecy.

At first she would not consent to that condition, but by degrees his entreaties, artfully mixed with a due amount of flattery and vague hints of destroying himself (a thing that could not be farther from his intention, for he had far too much regard for his personal comfort) if she refused him, made her give way, and he obtained a reluctant promise that she would say nothing of their engagement until he gave consent, and she postponed all thought of a wedding until she should be eighteen.

Mabel had a great idea of honour, and nothing could induce her to break a promise she had once made. Poor foolish child, she did not think at the time that she was laying up for herself nearly two years of deception.

She soon began to repent of the step she

had taken. Never before had she hid anything from her mother, and most difficult she found it to do so now. In vain did she plead to be released from her promise. Captain Danvers treated all such pleadings with contempt, remarking that he thought she had more spirit.

After each of these hasty interviews, the terrible conviction would force itself on Mabel's mind that she did not love Captain Danvers as she had deluded herself into believing. But no regrets could undo what was done. How she longed to throw herself into her kind mother's arms, to confess all, and ask her advice.

If Mrs. Allington had only known of her child's inclination, how much pain might have been spared her; but as she did not know, all she felt was that Mabel had done very wrong, and obstinately refused to acknowledge it.

On the evening of Mrs. Allington's return from London, Mabel had gone out to post a letter to Captain Danvers, telling him of her prohibition to speak to him in private,

and begging him to be guarded in his behaviour towards her before her parents. She was in hopes of returning before the travellers were expected, but unfortunately for her peace of mind they had returned by an earlier train than they had fixed.

Captain Danvers was now on leave, and that was how it happened she received a letter from him.

Everything proved unavailing to induce Mabel to say from whom her letter had come. Colonel Allington had an interview with her, which only increased her fear of him and did no good. She was considered in disgrace, though she had no actual punishment.

Fortunately Lord and Lady Trevor were so soon expected from the continent, that the attention of the family was not centred on Mabel.

CHAPTER XIX.

It is a hot day at the end of June; Melville Park is looking its best. In the distance

may be heard the sound of the haymakers, as leading their horses from heap to heap of newly made hay, they keep on increasing the loaded cart. In an adjoining field are some women, with forks and rakes in hand, preparing it to share the fate of its neighbour.

Very sweet the hay smelt, and very picturesque the haymakers looked, especially to the eyes of the occupants of the Allingtons' carriage as it passed the fields at no great distance on its way to the house.

"Nothing like an English scene after all for English eyes," said Percy Trevor, for it was he and Ethel who had just arrived from their foreign tour.

"No, indeed," she answered warmly. "It is quite refreshing to see a homely scene once more, for I am sure, though we have passed through many a grander, we have not seen a more beautiful sight than that old oak just bathed in the golden radiance of a summer's sun, with the tired haymakers collected under it for their tea."

Percy laughed, declaring Ethel had become

quite poetical until she had descended to the commonplace mention of tea.

They found all the family party waiting on the door-step to welcome them back. At first Mabel could scarcely believe the fashionable lady before her was Ethel, but she very soon found that her sister was hardly at all altered.

"I really think you have grown, Ethel; what an undignified thing for a married lady to do!" exclaimed Mabel, as they were sitting in the drawing-room, after dinner, that evening.

"Yes, I believe I have," said Ethel, laughing; "I am seriously thinking of telling Marie to let down some of my dresses. Really at my sedate age I ought to leave off growing. I shall be eighteen in a few months."

"I hope you made inquiries for Percy's interesting Italian heroine. I am most anxious to hear how she is getting on in her new life, and if her husband has found her out," said Mary.

"No, I am sorry to say; we did all we

could to find her, but she had left the cottage she was in, and no one seemed to know where she had gone ; as we were only in that part one night, we had no time to hunt long for her. I was anxious to get away, for fear a brigand might recognise Percy, and was in constant terror all the time we were there." Lord Trevor laughed and said he had a most anxious protectress in his wife, and did not think he should run into danger again while she was near him.

The evening passed rapidly away, and so did the following days, for Percy and Ethel had a great deal to tell, and could only stay a fortnight at Melville, as they were going on to stay with the Earl. They seemed perfectly happy ; Percy took the greatest care of Ethel, who was not very strong, the anxiety of the last year having told upon her. They left just before Granville returned for his holidays.

Captain Danvers was again in the neighbourhood, and although Colonel and Mrs. Allington watched Mabel and him attentively, they could observe nothing that

would justify their speaking to him, as he was not very intimate with them. They were not very anxious to become better acquainted with him, until they knew a little of his former history, which seemed very much in the clouds.

CHAPTER XX.

"A TELEGRAM!" shouted Mabel, rushing into the room where Mary and mademoiselle were seated, some months after the events narrated in the last chapter.

"Do open it quickly, Mary; I suppose it is from mamma;" and she leaned over her sister's shoulder, reading aloud, "Lord Trevor has a son and heir."

"Is that all it says?"

"Quite enough, too, I should think," said Mary, laughing.

"Fancy Ethel a mamma! I can hardly believe it; why, she is only just eighteen, but then she has been married nearly a year now. And I am promoted to the dignity

of aunt. I really feel an inch higher in consequence," remarked Mabel, drawing herself up.

"How delighted Lord Melton will be," said Mary; "I am glad he was staying at Heatherlands when I was there, I like him so much."

"I have never seen him, as I was staying there before he came; I wonder what mamma thinks of the place, I am longing to hear from her; I think she might have enlarged a little on the telegram."

"I suppose it was sent in a hurry, but we are sure to hear soon. As mamma only went the day before yesterday, she can hardly have had time to see the place, and her time is sure to be taken up now with Ethel and the baby."

While the two girls were talking, there was great anxiety at Heatherlands (the place belonging to the Trevors), for Ethel was apparently dying. The doctors all looked grave. Percy hung over her in despair, beseeching her to speak to him. Mrs. Allington was endeavouring to pour

something down her throat, and the servants were rushing about the house. No wonder that the telegrams received by the Earl and at Melville were short.

Hours passed, spent in breathless anxiety by two watchers in the sick-room. Every moment was expected to be her last. Night passed, morning dawned, and still Ethel lingered, and gradually hope, though very, very faint, began to steal over the doctors' minds. "If she continues a few hours longer, there may be some hope," they whispered to Mrs. Allington.

Presently her eyes opened, and her lips moved; she was asking for her child. Percy took it from the nurse's arms and placed it near her; she smiled faintly, and then her eyes again closed. From that time she began to improve, though the recovery was very slow.

That was a happy day when Ethel was allowed to go into her pretty little sitting-room, for the first time after her illness, and it was a pleasing picture to see the lovely young mother bending over her baby, Percy

watching her with a look of happiness. Ethel looked up into his face laughing. "Now, papa, what shall we name this little darling? Percy, of course, to hand down the name to posterity, and don't you think his uncle would be gratified if we called him Granville? But then, don't you see we must give him another name, otherwise either you or Granville would have the disrespectful appellation of 'old' before yours to distinguish you. Gerald has always been a pet name of mine. Do you like it?"

"Yes, any name you like, darling," replied Percy.

Ethel laughed. "What an advantage it is to be ill, when it makes one's husband so considerate for one's every wish."

And so the important subject was decided, and the baby was christened 'Gerald Percy Granville.'

Mrs. Allington remained for the christening, although she was anxious to return home, having been away so long. Her husband had certainly been constantly backwards and forwards, but she wished to keep

a closer watch on Mabel's conduct, which anything but satisfied her.

Ethel was anxious for Mabel to be god-mother to her little son, but she positively refused, and would give no reason for doing so, only begging that Ethel would not be angry with her, but she *could* not.

So Mary came with her father instead. The Earl was the only extra visitor there beside, as Ethel was not strong enough to bear any excitement.

Colonel and Mrs. Allington returned the day after, leaving Mary behind.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE meeting between Mabel and her mother was a sad contrast to what it would have been a year before ; instead of impulsively throwing her arms round Mrs. Allington's neck, and smothering her with kisses, Mabel now only gave a constrained kiss, and then turned to greet her father, of whom she was evidently afraid.

"And so my Mabel would not undertake the responsibility of godmother," said Mrs. Allington, smiling, as Mabel and she were alone together that evening.

"I hope Ethel was not hurt, but mamma, indeed I could not be."

"Why, my darling?" said her mother, watching her attentively.

Mabel was evidently struggling to keep back the tears that would come into her eyes at her mother's kind manner; she looked up with something of her old confidence, as she said: "I dare not make vows for another, that I have never kept myself."

"But, my child, none of us have kept the vows made for us at our baptism. Miserable indeed should we be if we were rewarded according to our merits—if you expect to keep those vows by your own strength you will fail. You will never know peace, my Mabel, until you give yourself to God, and serve Him from love and gratitude, instead of fear."

"Mamma, you don't know—I cannot. If you knew how wicked I am, you would see

it is useless. Please do not say any more."

Mrs. Allington felt thankful her child's reserve was diminishing a little; she talked long and earnestly with her of forgiveness for all who seek it. But Mabel said no more, except that it was impossible for her to be good. Mrs. Allington could only pray silently that her words might not be entirely thrown away on her.

That night Mabel lay thinking of her mother's words. Poor girl, she was in a sad state of mind. "Whichever I do will be wicked," she repeated to herself. "I dare not break that solemn promise, and then to go on deceiving dear mamma like this, oh, it is dreadful. How much longer is it to last, I wonder? Another year!" and she shuddered. "After all, do I love him as much as I thought I did when I made that promise? Oh, why was I so foolish? Why did I not insist on telling papa and mamma? Why does he wish to keep it a secret? Sometimes when he is so fascinating I feel I do love him, but at others I feel afraid of

him. I so dread that scornful look of his, when I beg him to release me from my promise. And we seldom meet now. How will it all end, I wonder?" And with this question unsolved on her mind Mabel Allington fell asleep.

Perhaps Captain Danvers' conduct does seem rather strange. Why should he wish his engagement to be kept so secret? and why should he be so anxious to have Mabel for a wife? In answer to the first question, he knew that if he went straightforwardly to ask for her hand, he should be refused, for Colonel and Mrs. Allington valued their daughter's happiness too much to trust her to a stranger; and if his former life were investigated, he knew his chance of obtaining Mabel was very small indeed. And now we come to the second question, why was he so anxious to have her? He wanted a wife, he wanted one pretty, lively, and talented. Mabel combined these three qualities; besides, he was as nearly in love with her as such a selfish nature as his could be in love with anyone but himself, and though a mere

child, he determined to secure her, and when once secured, not to let her get free again. He loved to feel and exert his power. He determined at last to persuade her to marry him, either with or without her parents' consent, but as yet he was in no hurry to come to the final arrangements.

Oh Mabel, if you had only known the character of him for whom you sacrificed your happiness, you would not have allowed yourself to be so easily entrapped !

The next day at luncheon, Colonel Allington exclaimed : " Have you heard that the regiment which has been here for the last two years, is ordered off to Ireland ? I suppose we shall have a fresh one coming to take its place."

" I don't think it will make much difference to us," replied his wife, " for we hardly see anything of the officers."

Mabel's heart was beating fast ; " Going away ! and never to tell her anything about it." Her pride was hurt, but though she would not acknowledge it to herself, a

great weight was taken off her mind at the thought of Captain Danvers' absence.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was Mary's last evening at Heatherlands; she had been there now three weeks, and Mrs. Allington was anxious to have her at home again, for Ethel was much stronger and there was nothing to prevent her returning.

The dinner was just over, and they were chatting over dessert, when a footman entered and handed Lord Trevor a telegram. He read it, and rose hastily from the table. Ethel hurried across the room to him, begging to know the contents.

"My father is very ill—I must go to him at once," was his hasty reply.

"Not to-night; oh, Percy, wait till to-morrow."

"I must go by the next train. Be my own brave darling," he whispered. "I will return as soon as possible, but you must not try to detain me."

Ethel said no more, but followed him out of the room, to hasten the packing and see that he had all he was likely to want. She knew how devoted her husband was to his father, and would not add to his anxiety by worrying him.

"Good-bye, my darling ; Mary will stay with you until I return ; take care of yourself and baby." So with a parting kiss Lord Trevor stepped into the carriage which was to take him to the station.

Ethel turned to go back into the dining-room with a sigh, where she found Mary with the baby.

"Where is the telegram, Mary ? I must see it. Is the Earl very ill ?"

"Let me see it, Ethel," said Mary as her sister picked up the paper that Percy had let fall, for she was fearful of any shock to Ethel, and suspected the news was worse than she anticipated, but it was opened before Mary had time to prevent it. Ethel gave an exclamation, and turning pale sank into a chair.

Mary hurried towards the bell, but

Ethel rose, saying, "I am quite well, Mary, but read that."

Her sister took it and read it: "Come at once, if you wish to see your father alive."

To Mary's relief the nurse came in for the child, so she was able to give her attention to her now weeping sister.

"Oh, poor Percy, how cruel to send such a message as that! some one staying in the house must have done so. They ought to have known how fond he was of his father."

Ethel was evidently grieving more for Percy than herself. For many years the Earl and his son had been all in all to each other, and the thought of being suddenly parted would be a dreadful shock for the survivor to bear.

As the sisters were sitting together the following evening, wondering that they had not heard from Percy, there was a peal at the front door bell. Ethel rushed into the hall, and in another moment was clasped in her husband's arms. She dared not ask the question uppermost in her mind, but he

quietly drew her into a room and shut the door.

Mary was not long left in doubt, for the news flew like wild-fire among the servants. The Earl had been seized with apoplexy, and had only lived long enough to see his son once more. The intelligence was so startling, Mary could scarcely realize it; she could hardly believe her younger sister was a Countess. Her brother-in-law's voice at the door, asking her to go to Ethel, interrupted her thoughts. She at once hastened to the room where she knew her sister was, and found her more composed than she expected.

"Oh, Mary, I wanted to tell you the sad news," she began. "But you know already, do you not?" she said suddenly, looking at her face. "Then, I must go to Percy. Poor Percy, it is such a terrible grief for him. He has to be off again to-morrow, as there is so much to be done; he only returned to tell me himself, in order to soften the shock; was it not thoughtful of him?" The sisters were going upstairs

together, when a faint cry made Ethel start.

"It is baby, dear," Mary said. "I will go to him, and nurse is there, so do not worry about him, but go to Percy, who wants you more." Ethel thanked her with a kiss. Mary went to the nursery, and found the nurse just hushing the child to sleep. He soon went off, and was laid down in his pretty cradle. As Mary stooped over the lovely babe she thought how unconscious he was of the trouble come upon his father, or of the title to which he himself had suddenly succeeded.

"Do you think him less delicate?" she asked, looking up at the nurse, who shook her head.

"I wish I could think so, miss; fortunately his mamma is unconscious how delicate he is."

"But are you sure it is well to keep her in ignorance of it?" asked Mary anxiously.

"Well, miss, I don't like to tell her, especially now, she has enough anxiety."

Ethel's entrance prevented Mary's reply;

she bent over her child with a loving smile, and then she and Mary went downstairs.

The following day Lord Trevor, or rather the Earl of Melton, for such he was now, returned to London. And the days following were employed by Ethel in getting mourning.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS. ALLINGTON, on receiving the intelligence of the Earl's death, would have hastened to her daughter, but she did not wish to leave Mabel again so soon, and as Mary was there she felt she was not so much needed.

Mabel's spirits had failed considerably, and her mother watched her with an anxiety that was becoming habitual.

Mabel had heard nothing from Captain Danvers since he had left the neighbourhood, and she was beginning to wonder if he had grown tired of her, and if so, would she ever be released from her promise?

When the funeral was over, and all the business arranged, Mrs. Allington was very anxious that Percy, Ethel, and the baby should return with Mary to pay them a visit. She had two or three reasons for this besides the wish to have her daughter with her. She wanted to talk to her on the future position she would occupy as the Countess of Melton. She also wished it for Mabel's sake, who she thought wanted companionship and cheering up by the sight of fresh faces.

The day fixed for their arrival came, and with it the expected visitors. Mabel was delighted with her little nephew, whom she now saw for the first time.

Both Percy and Ethel exclaimed at Mabel's pale cheeks, and declared she had been studying too hard, and must return with them when they left.

"You must not talk of going yet, my darling," said Mrs. Allington fondly to Ethel. "You have only just come—we

shall not think of sparing you for some time."

"Mamma, what is the matter with Mabel?" asked Ethel, a few days after she had arrived at Melville.

"I wish I knew," said her mother, sighing; "if Mabel would only be as open with me as she was a year and-a-half ago. She little knows the pain her reserve gives me."

"But she surely cannot be hiding anything from you, mamma. Mabel, I am sure, would be the last person to do such a thing."

"I fear she has sadly changed since the days when you were together, she is no longer the straightforward girl she was."

Just then the subject of their conversation came in, looking brighter than she had done for some time.

"Oh, Ethel, what a darling little Lord Trevor is; you see I give him his proper title."

"Don't you repent having refused the office of godmother?" said Ethel, laughing.

Mabel instantly became grave. "No," she said, quietly.

Ethel looked rather surprised, but said no more on the subject.

The days spent at Melville were very happy ones, and Percy began to recover a little from the depression into which his father's death had thrown him.

"It is so delightful being at home with you again, mamma," said Ethel, one day, as she was sitting with her baby in her lap. "I wish I could be always with you, for it will be such a responsibility to bring up this little darling aright."

Her mother sighed as she thought of the slender chance she had of bringing up her child, for she had noticed how frail the little thing was, although she could not bear to hint of it to the happy young mother.

"My Ethel must seek a higher direction than mine, in guiding and training her child," she said, gently.

"I know that, mamma, but I am so young, I hardly feel more than a child myself," Ethel said, smiling.

"Perhaps we did wrong in allowing you to marry so early."

"What is that?" said Percy, entering the room. "Are you repenting of having given me such a treasure? I did not think you were so selfish."

Ethel laughed, and called him a base flatterer. While Mrs. Allington shook her head, saying, "I am afraid you spoil her, Percy."

"That is impossible," he replied.

"Take care!" said Ethel; "you do not know. I have not had time yet, but soon I may turn out cross and tyrannical. And then you will repent having indulged me so; but I will leave you and mamma to discuss that important question, as I promised to go for a walk with Mabel."

"I can never be grateful enough to you and Colonel Allington for having spared her to me," said Percy, when the door closed after her. "I don't know what I should have done without her, especially during the last few weeks. I have been thinking, Mrs. Allington, that perhaps it would be better

for us to go to Melton Park, after leaving here. Ethel has never been there, and of course she must know our place sooner or later; any painful recollections it may have for me, will not be so vivid when she is with me, she is such a bright little darling."

"I think you are quite wise to go there first, and get installed," replied Mrs. Allington, "and after the first visit you will not dread a second so much."

"I hope you will let Mabel return with us. I am sure she wants a change, and we shall be delighted to have her. I must delay no longer writing to have a few alterations I wish made in the house. There comes your new doctor, he seems to have a wonderful attraction here," remarked Percy, laughing.

Mr. Woode, the young doctor, being announced, interrupted further conversation. He seemed rather disappointed on glancing round the room, to find Mrs. Allington and Lord Melton its sole occupants. After a few moments, however, Ethel came in, followed by Mabel. They shook hands with

Mr. Woode ; and Ethel, turning to her mother, said, " Baby is rather fretful, and nurse thinks he is not very well ; I have left Mary there, but I don't think there is really anything the matter with him."

Mr. Woode's face brightened at the mention of Mary's name, but that of Mrs. Allington wore an anxious expression.

" It is fortunate Mr. Woode is here, dear, as perhaps he will go up and see him."

" I shall be only too glad," he instantly replied.

" Oh, it is hardly worth while," said Ethel, " I think he is only sleepy ; but as you are here, if you like to do so, you can see him."

The doctor smiled, saying, " We shall soon ascertain if he is only sleepy."

" Well then, Mabel, we may as well go for our walk, as we leave the baby in such good hands." And saying good-bye to Mr. Woode the sisters went out.

Mrs. Allington sighed, " Poor child."

" Do you consider it more serious than

the Countess seems to think?" inquired the doctor.

"I fear so, but you had better come and judge for yourself."

The doctor followed her upstairs to the nursery, where Mary was standing near the nurse, who had the child in her lap. On the door opening she looked up, and a slight flush rose to her cheeks as she came forward to speak to Mr. Woode.

"I am so glad you are come," she said ; "for I am sure baby is worse than Ethel thinks."

It was as Mrs. Allington and Mary had feared, little Lord Trevor was very ill ; naturally a delicate child, he had caught cold, and an attack of bronchitis ensued.

Ethel was frantic on hearing, when she returned from her walk, her baby was really ill. She immediately rushed up to the room that had been turned into a nursery for the time, where she found the child lying on her mother's lap and struggling for breath.

"Oh; mother," she exclaimed in an agonized tone, "tell me what is the mat-

ter with my darling? He is not dying? Oh, say he is not dying!"

"I trust not, my child," replied Mrs. Allington. "He is indeed very ill, but we know he is in higher hands than ours."

Ethel took the child in her arms, and sat down in a low chair. They could not persuade her to leave the nursery that night, and she would hardly allow the baby to be taken from her lap for a moment. She bitterly reproached herself for going out so carelessly when her child's life was in danger. The doctor came again late in the evening, and looked very grave. He said to Mary, who followed him out of the room, "Can you not persuade your sister to lie down? She does not look strong enough to bear much, and if this should prove a long illness she will be knocked up."

But Ethel refused to leave the room. Even Percy's entreaties proved unavailing, and finding it only distressed her, they desisted; but her mother insisted on her lying down on a sofa in the same room.

For three days the baby appeared to

hang between life and death, but the many prayers for its recovery were heard and answered, for on the fourth day a slight change for the better took place; and when he was really pronounced out of danger Ethel's strength gave way, and it was some time before she recovered it sufficiently to travel.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ETHEL'S expectations fell very far short of the magnificence and beauty of the place which now owned her as mistress. She had never been there before, as when she and Percy had stayed with the Earl on their return from abroad it was at Heatherlands, for strange to say old Lord Melton had always rather avoided Melton Park after the death of his wife, and had preferred his smaller estate, which he afterwards gave to his son.

When Lord and Lady Melton, with Mabel, arrived at the station, they found their carriage, drawn by a splendid pair

of greys, waiting for them. They had not a long drive before they reached the park gates. The scenery which then surrounded them was as beautiful as art, combined with nature, could make it. A large artificial piece of water, crossed by picturesque bridges and winding through a small wood, where it ended in a pretty cascade, was the first object that they passed. Then the road took them through a wooded glade, on emerging from which they came to an old drawbridge, and crossing this a sudden turn brought them in full view of the magnificent mansion, a noble pile of building in the style of the reign of James I. It was again lost sight of for a short time, until they came into the drive leading direct to the front entrance. The old family butler came forward as they alighted from the carriage, to welcome the Earl and Countess to their home. The villagers had refrained from any open demonstrations, feeling they would be out of place so soon after the death of the old Earl.

“Ethel, dear, would you like to go to

your room and rest before dinner, which I suppose will be ready in about half-an-hour?" asked her husband.

"I should like to see baby's nursery and Mabel's room first. How strange it seems, to be shown about one's own house," she said laughingly, as she and Mabel followed the butler upstairs, where they were handed over to the housekeeper, whom they followed through winding corridors until they reached a flight of steps leading to the nursery department.

They found the nurse and baby already installed, the former in all her glory, giving orders to a new nursemaid the housekeeper had just engaged, and who was evidently in great awe of every one she saw.

Ethel found her maid Marie awaiting her in her own room, who was in a state of great delight on the discovery that the French cook was a countryman of her own, so she should no longer be obliged to speak always the "villain anglais" as she expressed it.

The change of air and scene had a

wonderful effect on Mabel. She threw off the restraint she assumed before her mother, and appeared more like the Mabel of old times. But it was in vain that Ethel tried to discover the secret that had altered her so much. As soon as that subject was approached she instantly resumed her reserve.

The days passed away very happily. Ethel seemed to have nothing left to wish for ; surrounded by a beautiful park and pleasure grounds, with hot-houses and conservatories. Servants and carriages at her command, while within the house nothing was forgotten that wealth could procure — costly furniture, works of art, pictures and statuary. The young Countess caused quite a sensation in the neighbourhood, and Mabel was astonished to see with what grace and dignity Ethel did the honours of the house. Placed in so high a position at such an early age, it was certainly wonderful how easily she became her rank.

Little Lord Trevor grew stronger every

day in the country air ; he was a fair lovely child and naturally a general pet.

Both Percy and Ethel were glad to be out of the whirl of a London season for one year at any rate, and the next they hoped to have Mabel with them to introduce into the world. Nothing occurred to interrupt their quiet life, until Mabel left them to return home, as Mrs. Allington thought her health and spirits were sufficiently restored to allow her to continue her studies again. At the same time she informed them that Mary was engaged to Mr. Woode, the doctor. It was not exactly what they would have wished in a worldly sense for their daughter, but as the young people seemed sincerely attached to one another, and there was no real objection to the match, Colonel Allington did not feel justified in withholding his consent.

Mabel sighed as she thought of the quiet natural way in which Mary's engagement had taken place, compared with the unnatural excitement and deception of her

own ; and to think he should prove false after all. She thought, " I shall never be happy again, with this dreadful secret always weighing me down. If mamma wishes me to be confirmed when I return home, which I suspect will be the case, it is impossible for me to consent to it, and then will follow some of those miserable scenes which leave both mamma and myself so unhappy. Oh, that I could stay at Melton Park, where I am never questioned ; but that is a useless wish."

Nevertheless Mabel was delighted to be at home again, after an absence of nearly three months. Everyone seemed so pleased to see her, and looking so much better than she did when she left.

Mr. Woode came up in the evening, and as he and Mary were in the back drawing-room, and Colonel Allington smoking a cigar in the garden, Mabel was forced into a *tête-à-tête* with her mother, a thing she had particularly wished to avoid for at least the first evening. However, there was no help for it, and she found herself seated on

a sofa, with her mother's arm encircling her waist, and her head on Mrs. Allington's shoulder.

There was a short pause, and then Mrs. Allington began. "I am so glad to hear you were so happy at Melton Park, dearest. I should not have sent for you so soon had it not been for the confirmation about to take place here in six weeks, and as of course you would wish to be confirmed, I thought you had better return in time to attend the classes."

Mabel's heart beat fast. She must speak now, and begin again all the misery she had gone through before.

"Mother," she said, with difficulty, "I do not want to be confirmed; if I am, it will be against my wish."

"Mabel!" said Mrs. Allington, in a startled tone, "surely I do not understand you right? Do you mean to say you willingly turn away from this means of grace? I should be the last person to force you to do a thing of this kind; unless you do it of your own free will, better, far better to

leave it alone altogether. But I had hoped better things of you, my child. Oh, think seriously and prayerfully before coming to such a decision ; you do not know that you will ever have an opportunity again. If I could but make you feel the importance of preparing for eternity, and the value of your immortal soul. Time is flying, oh, delay not, I entreat you, to seek for pardon and peace where you know it is awaiting you."

Mrs. Allington paused, she had not intended saying so much, but Mabel's apparent indifference impelled her. She waited for an answer, but no reply came, though the hand Mrs. Allington was holding in hers trembled.

"I do not ask for your answer now. I should wish you to consider it well, and then come and tell me ; and oh, Mabel, pray to be guided aright in your decision."

At that moment tea was brought in, and the rest of the party entering the drawing-room, no more passed between Mabel and

her mother on the subject of confirmation that night.

When Mabel retired to her room she felt more miserable than she had done for weeks past. The same passionate longing to tell her mother all, came over her, but was rejected as a temptation.

"I dare not break my word, even if he has done so with me," she repeated to herself again and again. "No, though it cost me a lifetime of misery, it shall never be said of Mabel Allington, that she broke her promise," she continued, unconsciously drawing herself up with an air of pride. If Captain Danvers had seen her at that moment he could not again have accused her of possessing no spirit.

Mrs. Allington was greatly pained and perplexed by Mabel's conduct. She had slowly and sadly relinquished the hope of gaining her child's confidence. Mabel was a mystery to her, she certainly had not lost all feeling with regard to affection. What could it mean? Ethel had said she was more like herself during her visit to them ;

could it be she dreaded *her*, her own mother? The thought was agonising. What had she done to alienate her child's affections? Had she pursued a wrong course with her altogether? Perhaps it would be better to send her away for six months, to finish her education. But the mother's heart yearned over her erring child, she could not bear to part with her, and send her among strangers. If *she* had been mistaken in her character, what would a perfect stranger be?

Mabel delayed telling her mother her final decision as long as possible. But the night before the first class for confirmation was to be held, Mrs. Allington entered her daughter's room, and quietly inquired to what determination she had come. Mabel told it in a low tone, and was heard in silence; her breath coming short and quick, as she waited for her mother to speak.

At last Mrs. Allington said, in a grave tone, "I had hoped my wish would have had more weight with you, Mabel; it is true I did not lay any command on you, as in this case I wished you to follow your own

inclination, but I need not tell you the pain your decision gives me. If you have nothing more to say to me, I had better leave you."

Mabel buried her face in her hands, and her whole frame was quivering with suppressed emotion. At these last words she raised her head ; she could not allow her mother to go without one kind word, or she felt she could no longer endure it.

Mrs. Allington had turned with a dignified bearing, and was leaving the room, when a cry from Mabel made her turn round.

"Mother ! mother ! do not leave me like this," cried the unhappy girl, falling on her knees, and grasping her mother's dress. "Say you forgive me !"

"My dear child, what have I said to cause this distress ? I forgive you freely ; it is not me you have sinned against."

Excitement had brought on a fit of hysterical sobbing, and Mrs. Allington was obliged to soothe her ; nor did she leave her until she had fallen into a quiet sleep.

Nothing more was said on the subject of the confirmation, for Mrs. Allington persuaded her husband not to mention it again to Mabel; meanwhile she prayed and waited until the time should come when her child would wish for the ordinance as much as she had before avoided it.

CHAPTER XXV.

“AND so we are to go to London, are we?” said Colonel Allington, some months after the events narrated in the last chapter. “Well, I have no objection for one, and I can answer for Mabel,” he added, looking across the breakfast table to his daughter, whose animated expression confirmed his words. Mrs. Allington smiled, as she said, “Oh, Mabel has been looking forward to this pleasure for some time, and strange to say Mary has never been there, so it will be her first visit too, as the last two seasons one thing or another has prevented our going. But now mademoiselle has left, and Mabel

is really emancipated from the school-room, there is nothing to prevent us taking them both to see a little of London life and society."

All was bustle and preparation for the next week, as the Allingtons intended to remain in town until nearly the end of the season. They were to stay with Lord and Lady Melton during their visit; as Ethel was particularly anxious to have her mother with her, feeling rather nervous at the important part she should have to play in society. She rather shrank from it, and wished she could remain with her husband and boy in their beautiful country residence; but their period of mourning was now past, and they felt they could no longer remain in retirement. Percy was very anxious to see his lovely young wife introduced and admired in London society, so Lord and Lady Melton left Melton Park, and arrived at their London house a few days before Colonel and Mrs. Allington, with Mary and Mabel, were expected.

As neither of the girls had been to Lon-

don before, there was, of course, a great deal for them to see, besides preparing for their presentation, which took place about a fortnight after their arrival, and was the commencement of their gaiety; the night following was an important one for Mabel, as it was to be the one in which she would be introduced to her first ball, given by the Duchess of Meadham.

A gay scene presented itself to the eye of the spectator in the suite of rooms where the ball was being held. Among the numerous guests were the Earl and Countess of Melton, Colonel and Mrs. Allington, and their two daughters. The impression our friends made may best be discovered by listening to the conversation going on between three gentlemen, who, during a pause in the dancing, are standing together at the entrance to the spacious ball-room.

"Well, what do you think of the *belle* of the evening, eh, Everard?" asked one, addressing a handsome, dark young man, near him.

"Who is she?" inquired the one referred to.

"What! you mean to say you have been in this ball-room for the last hour, and do not know! The Countess of Melton, to be sure! Her husband is a lucky fellow to get hold of such a splendid creature, a mere girl too, about nineteen. There she is, so feast your eyes on her. You are an admirer of beauty; come, give your opinion."

The gentleman addressed raised his eyes in the direction of his companion's, exclaiming, "That fair girl, coming this way, with those brilliant diamonds? You don't mean to say she is married?"

"Yes, I do, and been married some time. Lord Melton would not have won her so easily, had she been seen in London a season. By-the-by, she is sister to the pretty little partner you danced last with."

"Indeed!" said the other, with a little more energy.

"Her sister's beauty quite eclipses hers," remarked the third gentleman, who had hitherto been merely a listener to the conversation.

"On the contrary," replied the one ad-

dressed as Everard, "I prefer the younger of the two; I like her animated style better than her sister's lofty dignity."

The first speaker replied by a fit of laughter. "What a confession! The stately, sober Sir George Everard to acknowledge he prefers a lively beauty to a dignified one! But, my dear fellow, I do not think you would consider that Lady Melton lacks animation if you knew her. I never saw such a bright smile, or more varying expression than hers when she is talking."

"Her husband would evidently have found a formidable rival in you," remarked the other quietly.

Before his companion had time to retort, a lively waltz struck up, and he exclaimed, "I can't stay wasting my time here and lose this, I am off for a search after my partner; if you want one, Everard, I know lots of pretty girls I can introduce you to, lively ones too," he added with a laugh.

But Sir George refused the offer, and watched his companion go off; then turning and walking away in an opposite direction,

he happened to catch sight of Mabel, who was sitting in a recess. He quickly made his way to her, and taking a vacant seat by her side, remarked, "You are not dancing, Miss Allington."

"No," she replied. "I am rather tired, and it is very amusing to sit and watch the dancers."

"Do you mean to say you were hard-hearted enough to send your unhappy partner away on that plea?" he asked.

Mabel laughed. "There are plenty of other partners to be had, so my conscience does not reproach me."

She did not say the rejected partner had reminded her rather unpleasantly of a certain officer whom she had not met for many months, but such was the case. She could not say exactly where the resemblance to Captain Danvers lay, but that it was there was quite enough for her to wish to have as little to do with him as possible.

"There is mamma coming towards us," she added.

"Will you introduce me to her, Miss

Allington?" asked Sir George as he watched with admiration the dignified bearing and beautiful features of Mrs. Allington.

"Certainly," replied Mabel.

Much as her companion had admired Mrs. Allington before, he certainly did a great deal more, as approaching Mabel, leaning on her husband's arm, she said, smiling, "I had lost you, my child, and thought you were dancing."

Such a sweet smile and voice Sir George Everard thought he had never heard before. The tones of Mabel's voice, introducing him to her parents, roused him from the abstraction into which he had fallen.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"WELL, and did it come up to your expectations, Mabel?" asked her father, as they were driving home from the ball mentioned in the preceding chapter.

"Yes, *indeed*, papa. I never enjoyed myself so much as I have done to-night."

"I hope you have not left your heart behind you with any of those handsome partners," remarked Percy, who was the only other occupant of the carriage, the rest having left a little earlier.

"My heart is not so easily disposed of, I can assure you," retorted Mabel, leaning back in the carriage and declaring her intention of talking no more until they reached the house.

"Here we are close to it, so you will not long have to keep that heroic resolve," returned Percy, laughing.

Long and earnestly did Mrs. Allington pray for her child that night, while Mabel was asleep and unconscious that her mother was pleading that she might be preserved from the temptations to which she might be exposed in the life to which she had been introduced that evening. For Mary or Ethel the mother's heart did not tremble, she knew that their hearts were fixed where true joys are to be found. And who that has tasted of that perfect peace which passeth all understanding, can long

after the world's unsatisfying pleasures again? They may join in them, but while they are in the world, their hearts soar above it. But for Mabel Mrs. Allington did fear, she knew the temptations that would surround a beautiful girl like her, courted and flattered by perhaps men of high birth and distinction. Even the last night had given her a specimen. Mabel's conduct was still a mystery to her. She flattered herself that she knew all her children's characters, but in Mabel she had been strangely mistaken. Her behaviour was continually contradicting itself; one moment the straightforward, confiding girl, and the next reserved and mysterious; one moment light hearted and gay, and the next unhappy and out of spirits. What could it mean? For the last two years Mrs. Allington had asked herself the same question, and always with the same result. Her usual penetration signally failed her here, she could only wait and trust it would all be revealed in the right time.

The Allingtons were now in a whirl of

gaiety. Invitations kept pouring in from all sides, but Mrs. Allington firmly refused to allow Mary or Mabel to go out more than three times a week. Ethel was not strong enough to do so much.

Strangely enough, Mabel, instead of losing her bloom and freshness from this dissipation, seemed rather to recover it. She felt strangely happy, and yet it was but a transient happiness, losing sight of her trouble in the constant excitement of London life. She tried to forget all the misery of the past year, and to all around she was the gayest of the gay; though at times she would feel depressed, still, she roused herself and shook this off. Mrs. Allington watched her anxiously, and constantly asked herself if she had done right in bringing Mabel up for the season. She was certainly very attractive, and had had more than one heart placed at her feet. Mrs. Allington began to fear all this attention was not good for her.

One night Mabel entered her sister's sitting-room, attired for a ball. She found the Countess reading a book, with her boy asleep on a couch near her.

"Then you are really not coming to-night, Ethel. I am so sorry, I am afraid you will find it dull at home by yourself."

"Not dull, dear," said her sister with her sweet smile. "While I have Gerald and a book to amuse me, I think I shall enjoy myself just as much at home."

"I have a great mind to stay with you," exclaimed Mabel suddenly, "and let the others go without me."

"Nonsense, Mabel, you can't mean it! I thought you enjoyed balls so much. Besides *somebody* would be dreadfully disappointed. Surely you would not be so cruel, when you assured Sir George Everard this afternoon that you were going this evening."

Mabel turned deadly pale, and sinking into a chair exclaimed, "Ethel, what *do* you mean? What have I said? What have I done to make you speak like that?"

And putting her arms on the table she laid her face on them, sobbing passionately.

Ethel rose, and kneeling down by her sister's side, and putting her hand on her shoulder, said, "Why, Mabel, darling,

have you really never thought of such a thing before? Don't cry, dear. I thought you must have noticed how eagerly Sir George always singles you out at a party, and how often he comes here. Who should he come to see but you?"

"Ethel, don't! please don't! you do not know what you are saying. Come to see *me*, did you say? Oh, it is a mistake! It must be a mistake."

"It is no mistake, Mabel. I am not the only person that has remarked it. Has it never occurred to you before, dear?"

"No, never! How should it, when——"

Mabel stopped suddenly. What was she about to do? To break the promise it had cost her such pain to keep; the very idea made her shudder.

"When what, dear?" asked Ethel. But receiving no answer she went on. "But why should you be so distressed at hearing this, Mabel? Do you not care for Sir George Everard? Because if so, it is quite time you led him to understand this; as yet you have evidently given him en-

couragement, and you must know that Sir George is a man that will not easily brook being trifled with. He is so upright and straightforward himself that he cannot excuse anything contrary to it in anyone else."

Mabel raised her head, and Ethel was quite frightened to see how white she looked as, rising from her chair, she said in a strained unnatural voice, "I am not going to the ball to-night. Tell them so, please. You can say my head aches. It is true," she added, in answer to her sister's inquiring glance. "But promise," she said, squeezing one of Ethel's hands tightly, "to say nothing of what has passed between us to-night. Oh, promise!" she cried imploringly.

Ethel, in order to calm her, promised to say nothing unless it were necessary.

Mabel pressed a fervent kiss on her sister's brow, and then rushed out of the room, leaving Ethel in anything but a composed state of mind, and wondering at Mabel's strange conduct.

Mary's voice was soon heard at the door asking for Mabel. Ethel went out and told her what Mabel had wished her to say.

Mary looked very much surprised. "She was quite well just now ; what a very sudden headache," she remarked, and ran downstairs to tell her parents, who were waiting for them.

Mrs. Allington looked alarmed on hearing that a headache prevented Mabel going that evening, and would have remained behind had not Ethel come down and assured her she would take care of Mabel, and that she did not think much of her indisposition. Mrs. Allington was also unwilling to disappoint Mary, and so rather reluctantly she entered the carriage where her husband had already handed in Mary. The door was shut and they dashed off.

Mrs. Allington leant back in the carriage, and was very silent during the short drive. She was wondering what could be the matter with Mabel, and what this sudden indisposition could mean. It was so very unusual for anything to prevent her from going to

any kind of gaiety. But she had come to no satisfactory conclusion, when the carriage stopped, and they were handed out. As they entered the ball-room Sir George Everard, who had evidently been waiting at the entrance, came forward to speak to them, and on hearing the cause of Mabel's absence, was palpably disappointed.

"But she seemed quite well this afternoon," he said, eagerly.

"Yes, we only knew of it just before starting," replied Mrs. Allington. A new light was beginning to break on her mind, and she questioned herself, "Can Sir George Everard have anything to do with Mabel's refusing to come this evening?"

Mrs. Allington's thoughts were certainly very pre-occupied that night, and at last her anxiety to return to Mabel became almost uncontrollable, though to none but a loving, watchful eye could be seen any difference in her manner. Colonel Allington, however, noticed the anxious glances, and the effort it cost her to throw herself into every small subject of conversation that was

forced upon her, and so determined to leave as soon as possible. He went in search of Mary, who, on hearing his reason, was quite ready to go. Mrs. Allington gave her husband a loving, grateful smile, as he escorted her to the carriage, and whispered, "I thought I had succeeded well enough to deceive even your penetration, dear; this is kind and considerate indeed."

CHAPTER XXVII.

BUT to return to Mabel, who was meanwhile in a tumult of conflicting feelings; for the first time she now realized what it was to be really in love. What had she been doing all this time? She, who was engaged to one, whom, alas! too late she discovered she had never really loved, to have given her heart and affections to another! for that she had done so was undoubted, she could not deny it to herself. Strange, she had never discovered it before! Although

lately she remembered she had found herself often drawing comparisons between Sir George Everard and Captain Danvers, very much to the disadvantage of the latter. And why, on that very night, had she avoided wearing a single jewel? was it not because Sir George had once said that he thought flowers were the prettiest ornament? And many similar incidents arose in her memory, as she looked back upon the events of the last few weeks.

Now, for the first time, she felt how fast her bonds chained her. She wrung her hands in despair, as she cried, "Oh, if I were but free!"

To feel that she not only loved, but her love was returned, gave her agony instead of joy. To think she had been unconsciously deceiving the most honourable man she knew! "He will despise me! He will hate me! Oh, would that we had never met! How blind I have been!" Suddenly she raised her head, which she had buried in her hands. "Why should I consider myself bound to a man who has

not deigned to notice me during the last twelve months?" Then the thought of that fatal promise came across her mind. "No, no!" she continued. "Better, far better, to put a gulf between Sir George and myself at once, than go on deceiving that noble heart which would never suspect me of anything so utterly opposed to its own high principles. Perhaps, after all, it was fancy on Ethel's part to think he cares for me. How can he think twice of such a silly girl as I am, when he knows so many more beautiful and clever?" But this was mere sophistry, for she remembered how many times she had been singled out for special attentions, when many superior to her in actual beauty had been overlooked by him; she had accepted these numerous attentions half triumphantly as she glanced at the many envious eyes that followed her. Strange, she should never have considered the consequences. A ring at the door bell startled her, and she remembered she had not even begun to undress. Ethel had come to her soon after the rest had started, with

eau-de-Cologne and sal-volatile, but on Mabel's entreating to be left alone, and assuring her she would be better if quiet, her sister had withdrawn.

Hastily rising, she began to take off the white gauzy dress, which she had not troubled to do before, but she had not time to disrobe entirely before her mother entered the room, and was quite alarmed at the white face before her.

"Not in bed yet, Mabel? I hoped to have found you asleep. Has my wilful little girl been trying to cure a headache by sitting up half the night by an open window?" she exclaimed, glancing at the window. Then smoothing back the hair from Mabel's brow, she continued: "It is quite time I came back to look after you, and now I intend to stay till I see you safely in bed. I hoped Ethel was prudent enough to be trusted with you, but I find she is not so sedate as I thought."

"Oh yes, indeed, mamma, Ethel did want to do all sorts of things for me, but I gave her a gentle hint that her presence was not

required," replied Mabel, with an attempt at her old lively manner.

Mrs. Allington saw the effort, and sighed: "Let me brush your hair, my child," she said. "You always used to say that my brushing had a wonderful effect on your headaches."

And gently taking the brush from Mabel's hand, she commenced drawing it through the long silky hair.

It was very delightful, certainly, to feel her mother brushing her hair again, as she used to do; it seemed to Mabel many years ago. Yet she could hardly bear the thought, as she felt her mother's loving pressure, that she was deceiving her as well.

Not much was said by mother or daughter that night, for Mrs. Allington was anxious for Mabel to be quickly in bed, and the latter was fully occupied with her own thoughts.

When Mrs. Allington left Mabel's room that night, she talked over with her husband the various little incidences they had remarked in Mabel's conduct, and her

suspicious of Sir George Everard's intentions.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

COLONEL and Mrs. Allington's suspicions were soon to be verified, for the next day Sir George called and asked their permission to sue for the hand of their youngest daughter. The Colonel freely gave his consent and best wishes, saying, "There is not another man I know, Sir George, to whom I would so willingly entrust my child's happiness ; and if I am not mistaken you will not find it very difficult to obtain the hand you seek."

Mrs. Allington also held out her hand to him, as she said : "I quite agree in all my husband has said, Sir George, and I wish you every success."

He took the white, shapely hand held out to him, almost with reverence, as he thanked them for their kind encouragement

of his suit, and for so willingly trusting their daughter's happiness to him.

Sir George sought the first opportunity of speaking to Mabel, which occurred that night, at a dance given by the Countess of Melton.

Towards the end of the evening, in the middle of a valse, Mabel felt rather tired, and said she would sit down for the rest of the dance. Her partner, who was none other than Sir George Everard, led her into the conservatory, which happened to be empty, and giving her a seat, took another by her side, and gradually led the conversation to the point he wished. Mabel saw that escape was impossible. The crisis had arrived, and it was well she had been prepared for it. She felt herself growing cold and hot by turns, and dared not raise her eyes to his. She felt compelled to listen to every word that fell from his lips, without the power of stopping him. Words that fell on her heart like burning fire, seeming to scorch up every feeling there, save a wild love for him who uttered them, and a blank

misery, to think that in a few short moments he must loathe her—hate her !

She heard him ask her in anxious tones if she loved him, if she would consent to make him happy, and she felt almost paralysed, for though she strove to answer, her tongue refused to give utterance ; it was not until her companion rose, saying in a haughty tone, “Do you mean to tell me you have been deceiving me, leading me on all this time, in order to have a paltry triumph in the end ?”

She forced herself to look up. She saw his look of scorn, and felt she could no longer bear it ; better to die at once, she thought.

“No, no !” she cried. “What have I done to make you speak like this ? Oh, don’t look at me thus, I cannot bear it.”

In an instant every trace of scorn had vanished from his features, as with a look of intense tenderness he took her hand, saying, “Forgive me, I was too hasty ; I have wronged you. Yet if you knew what those few moments were to me. I was

fearing that all my hopes were suddenly dashed to the ground. But it is false ! You say it is false," he added more anxiously, as withdrawing her hand from his, she hid her face with it.

" Mabel ! speak to me. In mercy answer me at once. Unless you are only trying to increase your triumph, and see how far your power may extend."

He was again resuming his scornful tone, she could bear it no longer. The music had ceased ; soon the opportunity would be gone, even now she heard voices at the further end of the conservatory.

She lifted her face from her hands and gazed into his with such a look of agony that he was positively startled.

Again she tried to form the words that kept repeating themselves in her brain, "that it was impossible." But again her tongue refused to obey her.

He seized her hands in his, and holding them with a tight grasp, exclaimed, "Mabel, say you will be mine ! Do not keep me in this suspense. You say it !

You do not deny it! You cannot refuse to say it! Forgive me if I speak harshly, but I cannot help it, you *must* answer me."

Mabel was trembling from head to foot, and as she felt his grasp tightening on her wrists in his anxiety, almost without knowing what she did, she pronounced the word "yes."

In another instant he put his arm round the little trembling form, and passionately pressed a long fervent kiss on her lips. For the moment she felt quite safe, sheltered by that strong arm; safe even from Captain Danvers, and all her doubts and fears were forgotten.

But those blissful moments were not destined to last long, footsteps and voices warned them they would soon be discovered. Sir George, hastily releasing Mabel from his clasp, drew the trembling hand within his arm, and led her out of the conservatory, in the direction of the refreshment-room. Passing through the drawing-room, he saw a recess almost hidden from view; glancing round the

room, he found it nearly deserted, and led his companion there. Making her sit down, he said, "My own darling, you must give me a smile, or I shall begin to fear. I wrung that word from you which has made me so happy ; look up, and assure me this is not the case."

And she did look up, and although her face was still almost of marble whiteness, she gave him such a happy, joyous smile, that it quite satisfied him. After a few more loving words, he went in search of a glass of wine for her. When he returned with it she said, "I quite forgot, papa and mamma. What will they say ? . They must know of this."

"They do already. I did not presume to speak to you until I was quite sure that nothing but your own consent was wanted to make my happiness complete. I was beginning to fear a short time ago that my hopes were unfounded. You must forgive me what I said then, dearest ; but I felt if *you* had deceived me I would never believe in anyone again, but I will not

mention it, for I see it distresses you. Don't think anything more about it, darling," he added, before going off with the empty glass.

But it was not so easy for Mabel to forget all about it. "He trusts me so entirely," she thought. "Oh, if he knew how I am deceiving him, he would never speak to me again."

On Sir George's return he found Mabel in rather a pensive mood, and thinking it was the effect of his hasty words, devoted himself to restoring her cheerfulness again, and he succeeded in doing so. Mabel was determined to be thoroughly happy for one evening at least, and banishing all thoughts of Captain Danvers from her mind, she gave herself up to the enjoyment of the hour. She had never felt so happy before. That it would be a short-lived happiness, she must have felt had she paused a moment to think; this, however, she tried not to do, and succeeded in deceiving herself as well as Sir George for the time.

When the guests had at last all taken

their departure, Sir George led his blushing *fiancée* to her parents, to ask their final consent and blessing on their engagement, which were willingly given. Mrs. Allington sent up a silent thanksgiving to the merciful Father, who had allowed her dearly beloved, though erring child, such happiness. Yet it was with mingled feelings that she pressed her to her heart and whispered a blessing, for she felt Mabel was not yet what she prayed so earnestly she might become. She feared this worldly prosperity would still more alienate her affections from things above. She could almost have welcomed trial for her child, if she could have felt it best for her highest interests. Little did the mother know the dreadful secret that was gnawing at the root of Mabel's happiness, and would gradually consume it altogether; and perhaps it was better in the present state of things she did not know how Mabel was deceiving them all, for that tender, loving heart could scarcely have borne the grief of discovering that this child of her

affections and prayers was acting so sad a part.

Mabel herself, when alone in her chamber that night, could scarcely believe that she was the same girl of two years ago, when she remembered her horror and detestation of deceit in any shape or form. But now she argued it was too late to draw back, for she was engaged to Sir George Everard ; and it was with a sense of relief she felt she must now let things take their course. Perhaps Captain Danvers would not appear again until after she was married, then perhaps she might summon up courage to tell her *husband* all. Poor Mabel !

CHAPTER XXIX.

BEFORE going on with the story it will be necessary to give a brief account of the previous history of Sir George Everard, who lately has taken such a conspicuous part in our tale.

Left an orphan at the age of ten, with a

baronetcy and comparatively large fortune, he, with a younger brother, had been brought up by private tutors until he reached the age of fourteen, when he was sent to a public school ; from there he went to Oxford and gained honours. Having no settled home he used generally to travel in vacation time with one or another of his college friends, or visit his brother Ernest, who had entered the army. He was at the time we introduce him to our readers, staying in town with a married sister, the Honourable Mrs. Rotherbank. Having quitted Oxford, and with nothing particular to do, he was thinking of taking up some profession, when his introduction to Mabel Allington altered all the plans he had formed for his future.

His was a character capable of strong affection, with a great regard for truth and candour ; these qualities, combined with a certain amount of pride, made him at times appear stern and unrelenting. But we will leave the rest of his character to be discovered by our readers from his after history, and

will only say, in concluding this brief account, that in appearance he was dark, with regular features ; and dark, grave eyes, which were capable of expressing more than words often do.

The London season was beginning to draw to a close, and Percy and Ethel talked of leaving for Melton Park. Colonel and Mrs. Allington also wished to return to Melville. Mary, who was constantly receiving letters from Mr. Wood—who anxiously awaited their return—was nothing loth. Mabel was the only one who seemed to regret leaving ; but when Sir George Everard announced his intention of visiting Devonshire that summer, and was warmly pressed to stay at Melville by Colonel and Mrs. Allington, her feelings altered, and she was almost as pleased as Mary at the thought of returning to their beautiful Devonshire home.

It was a hot day in June that Lord Melton's carriage drove to the station, from which they had come two months be-

fore, with the Allingtons, who were soon established in one of the dusty first-class carriages, and rapidly borne away towards Exeter. As Mabel leant out of the window at starting, the last face she caught sight of on leaving the platform was that of Sir George Everard. With a sigh she threw herself back on the seat, her thoughts naturally turning upon the object on which her eyes had last rested.

It was late in the evening before they reached the village of Craggsford, and drove up to their own door, and they were all glad, after partaking of some refreshment, to retire to their rooms early. The next few weeks passed rapidly by, for arrangements were being made for another wedding on a smaller scale than the last that had taken place in that house, as both Mary and Mr. Woode wished it to be very quiet. The end of July was fixed for the event, and Mary was in a state of quiet happiness, a great deal too quiet to suit Mabel and Granville, who declared she did not deserve to

be married, if she did not make more fuss, and seem more delighted.

"But will you not allow me to be happy in a quiet way as well as a noisy way?" inquired Mary, laughing.

"Oh, of course you may please yourself in the way of showing your happiness, but I know when I am married, I shall have great preparations, and a grand affair. A wedding does not come every day, so it is as well to make the most of it," answered Mabel.

"I know what will happen when Mabel is married," said her brother.

"For about a month beforehand we shall see her tearing and rushing about all over the house, then when mother reproves her she will sink down in an exhausted state, on whatever happens to be nearest (the coal scuttle, for instance), and exclaim in an excited way——"

"Granville, don't talk such nonsense," exclaimed Mabel, making a rush at him; on stepping back to avoid her he fell over a footstool—which happened to be behind

him—dragging her with him. They soon succeeded in regaining their footing, both laughing heartily.

“What an undignified thing for an engaged young lady to do,” remarked Granville; “I wish Sir George could have seen you at that moment. When is he coming here, by-the-by? I am very anxious to see the favoured individual my mad-cap sister has condescended to notice. But Mabel, what will Captain Danvers say when he hears of it?”

The colour left Mabel’s cheeks at that name, she gave a start, and grasping the back of a chair tightly, asked, breathlessly, what Captain Danvers had to do with it.

“Why, you flirted most desperately with the poor fellow when he was down here. You need not pretend to be so innocent,” he continued; “and I heard the other day from some one or other, that he was in this part of the world again, so very likely he will appear just in time for the wedding. Take care Sir George does not get jealous,” he added, as he went out of the room

whistling, little thinking what his thoughtless words were to his sister.

After he had left the room, she still remained, leaning on the back of the chair, almost petrified. "What if Captain Danvers were to come when Sir George was at Melville?" The idea was too dreadful to be entertained.

Mary was busy with her work and thoughts, so did not notice Mabel's sudden silence; and as the latter was behind her, did not see her change of colour.

Presently the door opened, and Mrs. Alington entered; she instantly exclaimed in alarm, "Mabel, my child, is anything the matter? do you feel ill?"

But Mabel did not reply; her mother hastened across the room, and putting an arm round her waist endeavoured gently to lead her towards the sofa. The movement roused Mabel, who, leaning her face on her mother's shoulder, burst into tears.

What a relief it was to her! But suddenly remembering that they would suspect something, she made a strong effort, forced

back the sobs that threatened to choke her, and tried to answer her mother's anxious inquiry as to what was the matter. "Nothing, mamma, particularly ; I felt rather faint, I think, but am better now."

She tried to disengage herself from her mother's arm, in order to leave the room, but this Mrs. Allington would not allow, and gently, though firmly, insisted on her lying down there, whispering to Mary that she had better leave them alone together. She went to a book-case, under pretence of looking for a book, but in reality to give Mabel time to recover herself before she spoke to her. After a few minutes had elapsed, she said quietly: "Mabel dear, what was the cause of this sudden burst of tears ? It surely must have been something more than you say ; it is so very unlike you to cry because you are not feeling quite well."

But Mabel steadily refused to give any other reason, and Mrs. Allington felt she must be content with it, although she was convinced there was something more behind.

Mabel did not quite recover her spirits after that little incident until the day came which had been fixed for Sir George Everard's arrival; then, indeed, she shook off her depression, and in the gayest spirits accompanied her father in the carriage, to meet him at the station.

Melville House was again full of visitors, and the quiet village began to wear the appearance of a very gay one. The only drawback to the wedding was, that Percy and Ethel could not be there. Little Gerald was not well, and Ethel had always been anxious about him since his severe illness at Melville, so did not like to leave him. They sent costly presents, and every kind message, but these could not make up for their presence.

The wedding-day came, and everything went off well. Mary made a very composed bride, and looked sweet in her bridal attire. There was no occasion for tears, as the Woodes were to live quite close to Melville, so there would be only a short separation, between Mary and those at home,

during the wedding tour, which was to be in Scotland. By degrees all the guests took their departure from Melville, except Sir George, who had come on a visit of three weeks. Granville felt very much out of his element when the last guest had departed, for, as may be expected, Mabel's time was too much taken up for her to be much of a companion for him just then ; and he was continually appearing at most inconvenient times. In the morning, perhaps, he would take it into his head to go down to the stream which ran through one of the woods on the estate, for the purpose of fishing, and he would be sure to come on Mabel and Sir George walking together to enjoy the beauty of a summer's morning, as they expressed it, or sitting, on a carpet of tempting green moss, under an old oak, watching the dragon-flies sporting above the water in the sun ; very harmless and interesting occupations, no doubt, but why should they start and separate from one another so suddenly when Granville appeared, in an innocent manner, on the scene, with his fishing-rod

in hand? and why should Mabel find it very hot just at that very moment, and Sir George look as if he wished all the fish at—well, anywhere but there? These questions I leave to be solved by any who have found themselves in a similar situation.

And sometimes of an evening, Mabel and Sir George would think how tempting the terraces looked in the moonlight, and would saunter up and down them, and descend the flight of steps that led to other terraces below. Unfortunately Granville was generally seized by the same idea, and making his way to one of the stone pedestals that surmounted the flight of steps before alluded to, would mount it, and swinging his legs, thrust his hands into his pockets, and begin whistling with much pathos the air, "Ten Little Niggers," or something equally classical. Just at this identical moment a figure draped in white, leaning on the arm of another figure in black, would make its appearance below, both feeling indignant to a degree that the charm and poetry of the scene should be so rudely interrupted by such strains as were going on above their heads, but still more that

such inconvenient eyes as Granville's should be calmly surveying them from this elevation.

In fact, Granville was not sorry when Sir George took his leave, about the middle of August, for he said as long as the latter was in the house, he might as well not have a sister, for all the good she was to him.

Sir George was going to Cowes for the yachting season, where a yacht he had ordered to be built was awaiting him, and which he had intended to join in time for the Cowes regatta, had not the attractions at Melville been greater.

Before leaving he pressed Colonel and Mrs. Allington to name the day for his wedding, but this they would not do. Mabel would have been quite willing to have it soon, and thus put an end to her suspense with regard to Captain Danvers, but Mrs. Allington had many reasons for putting it off.

"She is too young yet; only eighteen, Sir George," she said, smiling. "We must ask you to wait a year or two; besides, we

cannot give up our only remaining daughter so soon."

With this answer he was obliged to be content.

Mabel accompanied him to the station. He promised to write often, and if possible to visit Melville again when he left Cowes. With many loving farewell words Sir George got into the train. One last pressure of the hand ; one last good-bye, and he was gone. Oh, when would she see him again ?

Ah, when ? and where ?

CHAPTER XXX.

It was the beginning of September, about a month or rather more after Mary's wedding, that the bride and bridegroom were expected at their new home. Mrs. Allington was staying at Melton Park, Granville had returned to school, and Colonel Allington and Mabel were thus left alone together at Melville.

One morning as Mabel and her father were seated at breakfast, the latter said, "I shall be engaged all day to-day, Mabel, so you must amuse yourself as best you can ; the carriage is at your disposal."

"It will not be very difficult to find amusement, papa. In the first place I must write a long letter to mamma and one to George, and then I can run down and see if Mary's house is all ready for them, and everything arranged as they wish. You know they are coming home to-morrow night. Then I want to change a book at the station, so I can drive there and——"

"Well," said the Colonel, laughing, "I don't think you need enumerate any more of your intentions. I shall not be afraid of your having nothing to do." So saying, he rose from the table and left the room, when Mabel took the opportunity of reveling in a letter which had come by that morning's post from Sir George Everard.

Yes, enjoy that letter to the full, Mabel; you may never have another in that dear handwriting again.

When she had finished she ran upstairs to put on her things. As her father passed in the dog-cart he waved to her as she stood at the window, saying, "Don't expect me home till seven o'clock dinner."

Running down to the library with her hat on, she began her letters, for it was part of Mabel's character that she always wrote letters in a hurry, prepared for doing something else the next moment; consequently all her letters were concluded "in frantic haste" as she expressed it, except her letters to *one* individual, who was favoured above the rest of her correspondents. So the letter she wrote to her mother proved very different to the *long* one she talked of writing. After sealing up the one to Sir George, she drew out her tiny gold watch and discovered she had only time for a short note, which was hastily scribbled off; and in a few moments the young lady might have been seen in her pretty morning dress and white shady hat making her way rapidly down the carriage drive.

Mr. Woode's house was not far from the park gates, so Mabel soon reached it, and after seeing that everything was in readiness for the young couple, and giving orders about sending the carriage to meet them, she went on to the clergyman's house, intending to ask Edith Foster, the eldest girl, to lunch with her.

She was shown into the neat little drawing-room, evidently set apart for company, and in a few moments Miss Foster appeared, a tall, dark girl, a year or two older than Mabel. She was delighted at the idea of going to Melville to lunch with Mabel. While she went to dress for it Mr. Foster came in. Now if there was one thing which Mabel had wished to avoid, it was a *tête-à-tête* with the clergyman, and here she was on the verge of the very thing she most dreaded; but there was no choice, and she must make the best of it, so she accordingly rose to meet him with as pleasant a countenance as she could command.

He was a dignified looking old man, with a benevolent expression of countenance. He

sat down by Mabel, and after a few words of congratulation on her engagement, he began the subject she most dreaded, which was her confirmation. He pressed her to think it over; in two months she would have another opportunity, and he knew her mother was anxious for it to take place before her wedding. She listened with ill-concealed impatience, thanked him for his kind interest in her, and promised to let him know her decision before the time came.

At last Edith made her appearance. Mabel felt sure she had purposely lingered to give her father an opportunity of speaking to her alone.

Mabel rose on seeing Edith, saying they should be late for luncheon, and the two girls were soon on their way to Melville.

After luncheon Mabel proposed a drive, to which Edith readily agreed. They drove first to the station, which was some miles from Cragsford, at the town where the regiments were quartered, and where the Allingtons' shopping was usually done.

Mabel got out of the carriage, telling her friend she would not be long, as she was only going to change a book at the library.

Crossing the line she just reached the book-stall as a London train came puffing in, and all was bustle and confusion for a few moments. Mabel was too intent on choosing a book, to pay much attention to what was going on around her, but suddenly a voice behind her made her start, and her face to blanch. She turned to see the owner of that voice, and found herself face to face with Captain Danvers.

For a moment the two gazed at each other in silence, which he was the first to break, and coming forward with his peculiar, treacherous smile, he took her hand, saying, "You surely have not forgotten an old friend, Miss Allington?"

Mabel drew herself back, haughtily, as she replied, "I never forget my *friends*," laying a stress on the last word.

Captain Danvers' brow darkened, and he said in a low tone, "Beware! I have you still in my power, and I shall use that

power to the utmost, if you attempt to go against my wishes."

Her only answer was a look of scorn, which, however, she was far from feeling. Taking up a book, she hurried to the other end of the platform, but before she could attempt to cross over, a hand was laid on her shoulder, and she was forcibly drawn back. She turned with indignant surprise, and was about to speak, when an express train dashed past, and she saw the danger she had escaped, but felt very vexed that she should be laid under such an obligation to the man whom—she now acknowledged to herself—she detested.

"Now Mabel, listen to me for a minute. I know all about your doings lately—never mind how—and have heard of your farce of an engagement with Sir George Everard," he continued, with a sneer, "so I thought it was nearly time to put a stop to this little game, and that is the reason you have the pleasure of seeing me now."

"I do not know how you have become so well acquainted with my affairs," said

Mabel, proudly. "As I have seen nothing of you for months, and as you chose to leave me in such an off-hand manner, *I* certainly did not consider myself in any way answerable to you for my conduct."

"Short memories are convenient sometimes, but I can assure you mine is long enough to remember a certain day when Mabel Allington promised to be Henry Danvers' wife when she became eighteen," he added, in a louder tone.

"Captain Danvers, I must beg you will make speeches of that kind more privately," exclaimed Mabel, indignantly, "or I shall consider myself at liberty to divulge any secret I may have promised to keep. Now I must wish you good afternoon," and with a haughty bow Mabel turned away, but not before Captain Danvers whispered, "This is not the last you will hear of me."

Mabel reached the carriage, and threw herself back in the seat, giving orders to drive home, and they were soon rapidly approaching Melville.

As may be imagined, Mabel's mind was

in anything but a tranquil state that evening. Again and again did she mourn too late her folly and deceit. Her father did not find her a very lively companion on his return.

The next morning as she was preparing for a ride with her father, her maid brought her a note, which proved to be from Captain Danvers, telling her he knew Sir George Everard very well, and that if she refused to give him an interview that afternoon, he should go straight to Cowes, and reveal everything to him.

Mabel was seriously alarmed at this communication, knowing as she did Sir George's horror of deceit. "Anything is better than that," she argued, so sitting down she wrote on a scrap of paper—"This afternoon, in the copse near the gamekeeper's lodge, at four o'clock."

Taking the precaution to seal it first with a small seal hanging from her watch-chain, she handed it to the servant, desiring it to be given to the messenger, who was waiting.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE first leaves of autumn were beginning to fall, and the setting sun was casting a mellow radiance on all the varied tints of foliage displayed in one of the many small woods or copses on Colonel Allington's estate.

The figure of a gentleman might have been seen hastily pacing up and down one of the narrow winding paths of this wood. All the beauties of nature were evidently lost upon him. Clenching his hand he muttered to himself—"Four o'clock, she said, and now it is twenty minutes past; it cannot be she has deceived me, if so, bitterly shall she rue it. No! I flatter myself my power over her is stronger than that. She *dare* not thwart me. And yet, how haughtily she treated me. I cannot allow her to slip so easily out of my hands, she is too beautiful a prize not to be detained. I always thought her pretty, but I was cer-

tainly agreeably astonished yesterday to find how she had exceeded my expectations. I hardly believed it when my cousin told me how she was admired and sought after at her first ball, but I see now I have not arrived any too soon to look after her. If she refuses to become *my* wife, she shall *never* become Sir George Everard's."

At this period his soliloquy was interrupted by the sight of a slight, graceful form gliding among the trees, and making its way towards him. He went forward to meet it.

We will not attempt to dwell on that interview, it must be sufficient to say that Captain Danvers at first tried entreaties, which were all received with a haughty coldness on the part of Mabel. Finding flattery useless, he tried threats. Mabel's cheek blanched, and she clasped her hands tightly together, as he told her that he knew Sir George Everard—his brother having at one time been in the same regiment as himself—"and small chance you will ever have of becoming Lady Everard,"

he said, with a sneer, "when he hears of your deceit."

"Oh, listen to me! Let *me* be the first to tell him. Release me from my promise!" gasped Mabel.

"Never!" he exclaimed. "Consent to fly with me now and you will be happy. Refuse——! and your happiness shall be ruined."

Approaching her he endeavoured to take her hand, but she drew back, crying, "No! no! Never, *never* will I be *your* wife; you may do what you will, but you will not succeed in that."

"Then you seal your fate!" he said. "A carriage is now waiting for me in the road, either to take you and myself at once to London, where we can instantly be married, or to carry me to the station, whence I depart instantly for Cowes. As for that promise of which you speak, I will never release you from it. If you can get anyone to believe *your* version of the affair they will be more credulous than the world in general. Farewell; you will live to

repent this day." With these words he turned away, and made his way rapidly out of the park.

Mabel, who during his last cruel speech, had been leaning against a tree for support, directly he was gone made an effort to recall him, but the exertion proved too much for her strength after all the mental torture she had undergone, and she sank senseless on the ground.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN a richly furnished room at Melton sat Mrs. Allington with her daughter and son-in-law, the evening of the same day as the events narrated in the last chapter took place.

Ethel glanced at the clock, remarking, "Nine o'clock? Why how quickly the evening has passed."

"Not passed yet," said Percy. "We have not even had tea. I hope you don't intend depriving us of it to-night."

"Certainly not," replied Ethel, laughing. "What can they be doing not to bring it up? ring, please. Oh, here it comes."

"No, it is not," added Percy, as a footman entered, bringing in something on a waiter, and handing it to Mrs. Allington.

"A telegram!" she exclaimed, turning pale and opening it hastily.

"What is it, mother?" exclaimed the young Countess, rising and going to her mother's side with an anxious look.

"My poor child! Mabel! I must go to her at once," said Mrs. Allington. "But I shall be sorry to leave you, my darling," she added, turning to Ethel.

"Oh, never mind me, mamma. But tell me what is the matter with Mabel."

Mrs. Allington placed the telegram in her hands, and she read, "Mabel is ill! Come as soon as you can. But do not be alarmed."

Percy read it over his wife's shoulder.

"What time does the next train for Exeter leave?" asked Mrs. Allington.

"To-night!" exclaimed the Earl and

Countess together. "It is quite impossible for you to go to-night. There will not be another train until the mail. Surely there is no such haste required; the telegram says you are not to be alarmed."

Mrs. Allington shook her head sadly. "They would not have telegraphed if there had been nothing alarming."

"But, mother, you cannot travel all night, and then nurse Mabel all day. Do wait until to-morrow," Ethel pleaded.

Mrs. Allington acknowledged the truth of this remark, and consented to remain until the morning.

At an early hour the next day she started with an anxious heart on her journey, with only her maid to accompany her.

On reaching her destination, after a journey of several hours, she found the carriage had been sent to the station on the chance of her arriving by that train, and Mary had come in it.

"I am so glad you are come," she said, as they were driving back. "It will

take so much responsibility off Edward's mind.

"But what is the matter with Mabel? tell me everything, for as yet I have heard nothing," said Mrs. Allington anxiously.

"I forgot you had not heard," answered Mary. "We very much fear it is brain fever."

Mrs. Allington's face became whiter as she murmured, "Go on."

"The gamekeeper was walking through the copse leading to his lodge yesterday evening, when he thought he heard some one calling, and—" Mary looked at her mother to see if she had better proceed.

Mrs. Allington pressed her hand, saying, "Tell me all; do not, I entreat you, hide anything from me."

"On going in the direction of the sound, he saw Mabel lying on the ground. She had only fainted," Mary added, hastily, as an exclamation of pain escaped her mother's lips.

"He carried her up to the house at once, and then Edward and I, who had fortu-

nately just arrived, were sent for ; we have been with her ever since. But I am so thankful you have come, as she is continually asking for you."

"Is she conscious?" asked Mrs. Allington.

"At times she appears to be so, but it is difficult to tell."

When the carriage drove up to the door, it was opened immediately, and Colonel Allington came out. He led his wife into the house, making her take a glass of wine before he would answer any of her inquiries. Mrs. Allington wished to go at once to Mabel.

"You are not fit for it yet, dearest," he said, firmly. "You must see Edward first ; he is with her now, but will be down directly, I expect."

"Is there anything worse than I have been told?" asked Mrs. Allington, anxiously.

"I trust not, dear ; I don't know how much you have heard, but I expect Mary has told you all. We fear Mabel has brain-

fever, but the cause of it we cannot discover. She seemed very well the day before yesterday, except in the evening, when she was rather quiet. I attributed it to fatigue ; and yesterday morning when she went for a ride with me, she certainly seemed rather excited, but I never thought of her being unwell, and she did not complain."

Edward Woode soon appeared, Mrs. Allington advanced, holding out her hand to him, and asking, in a tone of forced calmness, what he thought of Mabel.

"This is not a very cheerful welcome for you," he said, taking her offered hand. "But I hope our patient will soon be better, and reward you for coming so promptly."

"Is she very ill? Tell me the truth, I can bear it better than suspense," said Mrs. Allington, earnestly.

"Will you come and see her for yourself?" said Edward ; "as to her real state I am hardly prepared to say, but I expect a more experienced person than myself to come this evening and give his opinion. Do

not be alarmed," he added, kindly. "I wished to have the best advice for her, and so sent for him."

Mrs. Allington was scarcely prepared for the change she found in Mabel, who was moaning and tossing restlessly from side to side. The mother turned to the doctor in mute agony.

"She has been like that ever since she was first taken ill," he said.

"What can have been the cause of this illness?" inquired Mrs. Allington.

"I should imagine something must have been troubling her," he answered, "and her fall may have had something to do with it."

"But what could have made her faint? It is a thing Mabel has never done in her life before. She is not given to that sort of thing at all; if it had been Ethel, I should not have been so surprised, but in Mabel I cannot understand it," remarked Mrs. Allington.

"Nor anyone else," replied her companion; "all we know is that she evidently

fainted while walking in the park. I suppose she must have felt ill suddenly. But now let me beg of you to rest, before you begin the duties of nursing."

Mrs. Allington assured him she did not require rest, and finding he could not persuade her to do as he recommended, he left her watching by Mabel's bedside, with all necessary instructions.

"Mary," he said, putting his head in at the library door, "I want you to come back with me. The carriage is waiting; you can finish that letter at home."

Mary protested that she was wanted at Melville.

"No. Your mother is with Mabel, so come, dear."

She hastily complied, and slipping on her hat and jacket, was soon seated in their dog-cart by the side of her husband.

"Sir James Somers will be here by the five o'clock train," he said, as soon as they had started. "I suppose you have made arrangements for him to sleep the night at our house. I shall bring him back with

me to dinner, after he has been to Melville."

Mary said everything should be in readiness for him ; and then followed a conversation on Mabel's illness, and the probable causes of it.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MARY'S dinner was kept a long time waiting for Sir James and her husband that night. But at last they appeared, with very grave faces. They were very quiet during dinner, only making a few commonplace remarks, until the dessert was placed on the table, and the servant had retired.

"I think I must ask you to extend your hospitality a day or two ; this case requires watching," said Sir James.

"For as long as you will stay," replied Edward Woode.

"But do you consider my sister is very ill?" broke in Mary, unable to restrain her anxiety any longer.

"Certainly," answered Sir James, carefully wording his sentence. "I consider your sister requires a great deal of care and good nursing. But what are you doing here? Why do you not nurse her? Your mother does not look strong enough to bear much of that work."

"My wife has been nursing her, nor would she have left her now had not I insisted on it," replied Edward for his wife, rather testily.

"Oh, that is a different thing, quite a different thing," answered Sir James. "But don't take offence at anything I say, young man, you will soon become accustomed to me; I always speak what I think straightforwardly."

"So it seems," thought Edward, but he said nothing, and as Sir James had fallen into a fit of thought he signed to Mary to leave the room.

That night revealed the mystery to Mrs. Allington. By the side of her child's sick bed she heard the whole of the sad secret

which had weighed so long on Mabel's mind.

Who can describe that mother's feelings as she listened to Mabel's heart-rending cries to be released from her fatal promise, and her fears that Sir George would cast her from him for ever? And then would come wild entreaties to her mother to bear with her and not to hate her.

Mrs. Allington sank on her knees beside the bed, powerless to give relief, murmuring, "Oh, my Mabel, if I had but known of all this before, how much grief might have been spared us both." And then the terrible dread would force itself on her mind that this might be her child's *death-bed*. Shudderingly she asked herself, "Was Mabel prepared to die?" All she could do was to pour her grief into that Loving Ear ever open to the petitions of poor, helpless mortals, and implore for mercy on her erring child.

The morning came at last, and as the first streaks of crimson appeared in the eastern sky, announcing the approach of

dawn, Mrs. Allington was persuaded to lie down in order to get a little rest.

Sir James Somers came directly after breakfast to visit the patient. He shook his head ominously, and installed Mary as nurse. He afterwards had a long conversation with Mr. Woode in the library, and inquired very minutely into Mabel's history. Of course Edward could only tell him what every one else knew. But it did not satisfy Sir James. "Is there nothing more?" asked he. "Has there been no quarrel with this Sir George Everard?"

"None that I know of, and I should have been sure to hear through Mary."

"There must have been some cause for this illness," continued Sir James thoughtfully. "Naturally a strong constitution, you say—nothing the matter with her before—high spirits! No, something on the mind must have occasioned this; things don't come on so suddenly as all that."

If they could have looked over Mrs. Allington's shoulder at a letter she was reading at that moment, perhaps they

might not have been so perplexed to give a reason for Mabel's illness. For that morning's post had brought a letter from Sir George Everard to Mabel, releasing her from her engagement with him in a few bitterly sarcastic sentences, each one of which pierced Mrs. Allington's heart like a dagger. She could not in justice blame him, as Mabel had greatly wronged him, and of course he had only heard Captain Danvers' version of the story.

All that Mrs. Allington could now do was to seek her husband, and telling him all she had discovered from Mabel's unconscious wanderings, place the letter in his hands.

Colonel Allington's indignation knew no bounds when he heard all his wife had to tell. "What right has such a villain to be at large?" he exclaimed. "Is there no law or anything against it? How dare he keep my daughter to a promise that he forced her to make, and so ruin her prospects for life?"

"I am afraid Mabel had too much to do with it; the promise must have been given with her own free will," said Mrs. Alling-

ton, sighing. "Blind that I was never to have discovered this before," she added, pressing her hand over her eyes.

"My dearest, it was quite impossible you should suspect such deception on Mabel's part," said her husband soothingly. "I could never have believed that a child of mine could be capable of such conduct."

Mrs. Allington soon returned to the sick-room, as she could not bear to be away from Mabel's side longer than was absolutely necessary. The result of their conversation was a letter from Colonel Allington to Sir George, stating briefly the facts that had come to his knowledge, mentioning Mabel's illness and consequent inability to write herself, and returning the various presents from Sir George to her.

And so ended poor Mabel's engagement with the only man she ever really loved; begun in deceit, what wonder was there that it was broken off thus sadly.

It is not necessary to enter into the details of Mabel's illness. She continued to grow worse, and one day Sir James

advised that her long, beautiful hair should be cut off; but when the scissors were raised to do it she instinctively put up her hand, and seemed so uneasy that Sir James, who was standing near, to every one's astonishment, motioned them to desist.

He said to Mr. Woode afterwards, "You know I have no hope of saving that poor child's life, and it will make no difference if her hair is cut off or not, so it is not worth while to worry her more than we can help."

"Do you consider the case so hopeless?" asked his companion. "I feared it myself, but ought we not to let her mother know?"

"She knows as well as you or I," answered Sir James; "I have not watched her face for nothing, and there is despair written on every feature; no need to tell her. If," he continued, lowering his tone, "the delirium continues after twelve o'clock, to-night, she must sink before morning; there is no chance for her. Sleep is the only

hope, she cannot bear up against any more fever."

Colonel Allington heard the true state of the case, before the doctors left the house. He sought out his wife, to break it as gently as he could to her, but he found it unnecessary, for she already suspected the worst.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A HARVEST moon was shedding a silvery splendour on the fine old trees and the waving ferns of Melville Park; all the scene seemed to speak peace and tranquillity to the mind, but while nature was reposing in all the dignity of its beauty without the house, there was no repose for the inmates within that night. It was a time of fearful suspense for all those nearly connected with Mabel Allington. That night must decide whether she live or die.

Mrs. Allington knelt at the head of the bed, watching her child's every movement, with the most intense anxiety. With

clasped hands she was inwardly praying for her precious one's eternal safety, and trying to school her own mind into submission to her Heavenly Father's will.

Sir James Somers stood near her, with his finger on the patient's pulse, and his watch in the other hand, counting the moments.

Colonel Allington stood at the foot of the bed, and Mary and her husband opposite Mrs. Allington and Sir James.

There was a dead silence, except when broken by Mabel's feeble moaning or indistinct murmurings. The minutes crept slowly on, until suddenly twelve o'clock was heard to strike from a distant clock. The groans grew fainter and fainter, and at last ceased altogether.

"Was it the silence of death?"

Mrs. Allington buried her face in her hands, she could not nerve herself to look on Mabel's face. All the rest turned anxiously towards Sir James, who was holding a feather near Mabel's lips; in a few moments he raised his head, and turning to

Colonel Allington, said in a low tone, "She lives!"

Low as it was, Mrs. Allington's anxious ear caught the sound. She raised her head, but the intense joy and relief those words gave was too much for her strength, after all the anxiety and misery she had undergone, and Sir James had only just time to start forward and catch her in his arms, or she would have fallen fainting on the floor. He and the Colonel carried her to an adjoining room, where the former began using means to restore her. Mary followed, anxious to be of use, but Sir James sent everyone out of the room except Colonel Allington.

It was some time before Mrs. Allington opened her eyes, and when she did so a spasm of pain flitted across her brow; turning to her husband she uttered the word "Mabel!" in an anxious tone.

Sir James stepped forward before the Colonel could reply, saying, "I trust that now there is hope. Although I do not wish to raise your expectations of her recovery too much, for there is yet a great

deal to contend with, in the way of weakness. But certainly the *crisis* is past."

An expression of relief rested on Mrs. Allington's features, as, clasping her hands, she inwardly sent up a thanksgiving for the mercy vouchsafed her child.

"And now, my dear madam," continued the doctor, "you must consider yourself my patient." And taking her hand he felt her pulse and shook his head. "Far too low! been allowing yourself to get far too low! This won't do; won't do at all. Port wine, steel, and everything strengthening you must have."

Mrs. Allington vainly endeavoured to assure him she was quite well, and could not afford to be made an invalid.

"No, Mrs. Allington; I am a doctor, and so I suppose you will allow I must know best. I intend to doctor you, whether you like it or not. I am not going to consult your taste in the matter, for if I did, it would end in an illness which would put a stop to nursing or anything else."

With this unusually long speech for him,

Sir James left the room ; going first to see Mabel, and giving a few directions to the nurse, he then went on to find Mr. Woode, whom he discovered in the library with his wife, and who as the door opened was saying something about being obliged to go at once.

“Go !” exclaimed Sir James, “just at the very time I want you ! What is this imperious haste for ?”

“Mrs. Green has just sent for me in a great hurry ; she has a fit or something. I must go off at once,” said Mr. Woode, hurriedly.

“Nonsense, let Mrs. Green get out of her fit ; she will do it just as well out of your presence as in it,” said Sir James ; “I want you for something more important.”

“Nothing worse in Mabel’s case I hope ?” asked the younger doctor with anxiety.

“No, no, she is going on as well as we can expect. Wonderful ! Wonderful ! Never should have thought it ! Had given up all hope myself.”

Edward Woode awaited with some im-

patience the end of Sir James's soliloquy, and then reminded him of the important business of which he had spoken.

"Oh, to be sure; yes, I had almost forgotten what I had come to tell you."

Mr. Woode bit his lip impatiently.

"Now, my dear fellow, don't agitate yourself on Mrs. Brown's—I mean Green's account; depend upon it she has only taken a glass too much——"

Here Edward interrupted him, fearing he would begin soliloquising on that subject.

"What I was going to say is that you must both take care of Mrs. Allington; if she does much more she will be laid up, there has been too much strain on her already. I have been into our patient's room, and nothing can be done there until she wakes, which, I hope, will not be for some time; the longer she sleeps the more chance for her life."

"Then I may go now, I suppose," said Edward.

"Bless the fellow! He won't be happy unless he does, I suppose. Yes, go by all

means; it is your wife I want, not you."

But Mr. Woode had left the room before the end of this complimentary speech. Sir James then turned to Mary, and told her what he wished her to do; desiring her to make up her mind to stay at Melville for the present, which was finally arranged.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AFTER a long time Mabel awoke from her sleep. She was sensible, but seemed to have no recollection of anything that had occurred lately; this was fortunate, as it must have considerably retarded her recovery if she had remembered the painful events previous to her illness. As it was, she was contented to lie still in a very weak and exhausted state; seldom speaking, and taking the things given her with a languid smile and feeble thanks. But this state of things could not long continue, for as strength returned, memory also began

gradually to resume her sway. Mrs. Allington watched anxiously for the first gleam of returning recollection, for the terrible fear that her child might never entirely recover her mind after the illness, and mental agony she had endured previously, began to take possession of her.

But such was not the case. It was only such utter prostration and weakness that rendered it impossible for her to remember or notice much.

She had so far recovered her strength that Sir James Somers thought it no longer necessary for him to remain at Melville, so leaving all necessary instructions with Mr. Woode, he took his departure for London, to the regret of everyone, for with all his peculiarities he was a thoroughly 'kind-hearted man, and so clever in his profession that they could entirely rely on his judgment. But he had already been absent from London longer than he had intended, and was very much in request there by this time. Mabel was now really making progress towards convalescence, and her mother was

nearly herself again, now that a great deal of her anxiety had been removed.

One morning, as Mrs. Allington entered Mabel's room, she noticed a decided alteration in her looks, and a degree of excitement in her manner which she had not remarked in her since her illness.

"Mamma," she said anxiously, "have there been any letters for me since I have been ill? Tell me the truth, please," she added earnestly.

Mrs. Allington paused a moment, the truth might throw Mabel back, but she could not deny there had been letters, so hoping to divert her thoughts, she said, "Yes, my darling, and I have had one that I am sure will interest you, from Percy, saying that Ethel has a dear little girl."

"Oh, I am so glad, how pleased Ethel must be," replied Mabel, her face brightening for an instant; then resuming the anxious look she had worn when her mother entered the room, she said in a choking voice, "Has a letter come for me from—from—you know who I mean?"

Mrs. Allington saw it was worse than useless to put her off any longer, so sitting down, and taking one of Mabel's hands in her own, she told her very gently about the letter received from Sir George Everard, the contents of which we already know.

She had hardly reached the conclusion before Mabel's head fell back on the pillow with a groan. Mrs. Allington hastily rang the bell, and applied the usual restoratives.

"It has been too much for her in her weak state. I was afraid it would be, but how could I do otherwise?" said Mrs. Allington to her husband, who had anxiously inquired what was the matter with Mabel.

"It is a good thing over," he replied. "And now I hope she will worry no more about it. She has been taught a lesson which I should think she will not easily forget."

When Mrs. Allington returned to Mabel, she found her restored to consciousness, but with a look of despair written on her features.

"Do you feel better now, my child?" she asked, bending over her with an air of tenderness.

"Yes, thank you," was the reply. But so sad and dejected was the tone, that it went through her mother's heart. Pressing a long kiss on her forehead she murmured, "My poor darling !"

"Don't, mother, don't, I can't bear it. I do not deserve such kindness," the poor girl sobbed, burying her face in the pillow.

Mrs. Allington allowed the sobs to have their course, knowing it would be a relief, gently soothing her, as she used to do when Mabel was a child. At last the weeping grew quieter, and Mabel raised her head.

"Can you really forgive me, mother, for all the trouble I have caused you, and my deceit? Is it too much to ask?"

"I forgive you fully and freely all the pain you have caused me, my child, and your father does the same. But, Mabel, have you sought a higher forgiveness than ours?"

"I dare not, mother. How can I when I have been living in deceit for so long? I feel I can never dare ask God to forgive

me. I have no hope of happiness now, either in this world or in the next."

"Hush, Mabel," said Mrs. Allington, authoritatively, laying her finger on her daughter's lips. "You must not speak in that way. Remember, my child, what cause for thankfulness you have, that you were in mercy spared through your dangerous illness, and not called away before you had time to prepare for your change."

"But I am too wicked, mamma, ever to hope to be forgiven."

"Christ came to save *sinner*s, and He casts out *none* that come unto Him," said Mrs. Allington, gently. Then sitting down by the bedside, she talked long and earnestly with her child, repeating again "the old, old story," that is ever bringing new hope and comfort to a sin or sorrow-stricken heart.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

VERY slow was the progress Mabel made in health. She used to lie for hours together

on the sofa, or in an arm-chair near the window, too weak to attempt to do anything. Nothing seemed to rouse her, and her parents began to get anxious about her, and contemplated asking Sir James to come down and see her again.

But although her earthly happiness was shattered, as she felt for ever, a strange peace and calm was beginning to settle on her heart. The work of grace had begun, and was silently going on. Although the cloud was dark, it had its silver lining of mercy.

Mrs. Allington asked Ethel and her husband to come down to pay them a visit, and bring their two children, hoping they might cheer Mabel a little. They had to be careful not to excite her at all; so the evening that the Earl and Countess arrived, Ethel was the only one allowed to see her, and that only for a short time.

The next morning little Lord Trevor was brought by his nurse into Mabel's sitting-room. He was very delighted at being allowed to sit with "Auntie Mabel;" and

he really seemed to do her good, with his pretty childish ways. He was petted by the whole household. He was a beautiful boy, with laughing blue eyes and bright, sunny hair.

Ethel was determined not to spoil her children, and the way she used to exert her authority over Gerald always amused Mabel.

"I think you are very proud of displaying your importance," said she, one day, when his young lordship had been carried out of the room in disgrace for pulling something off the table.

"It is never too soon to teach them obedience," said Ethel, gravely.

Mabel laughed. "You have turned into quite a sober, practical mamma, Ethel. Have you begun to teach baby to obey yet?"

"It is all very well to laugh, Mabel, but I can assure you having to bring up two children is a great responsibility. I only wish I could be such a mother to them as mamma is to us."

"Ah, she is indeed a loving mother," sighed Mabel. "You have not experienced

it as I have, for you never deceived or grieved her, and yet through all she has been so kind and gentle."

"Deceived her, Mabel? I was never told that, but I always fancied there was something constrained in your manner towards mamma. Was it anything more than a mere quarrel that caused your engagement to be broken off?"

Mrs. Allington entered the room at this moment, and, alarmed at Mabel's flushed cheek, called Ethel away, and kept the former quiet for the rest of the day.

It was now Mabel's wish to be confirmed, and as soon as her mother discovered this, she arranged for Mr. Foster to come to the house to prepare her. Time went on. Still there was not much change for the better in Mabel's health. Her friends watched her anxiously, for she seemed to be gradually fading away. The doctors recommended change. Mabel, however, was so anxious to be confirmed first, that her parents could not refuse her.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CALMLY peaceful lay the little churchyard of Craggsford, surrounding the old grey church, one beautiful October day. Without those ivy-clad walls the sun was shedding a mellow haze upon the tombstones, where the shadows were continually shifting as the breeze gently swayed the boughs of the trees backwards and forwards. Within those walls knelt Mabel Allington, and dedicated herself henceforth to the service of God.

Very fragile and lovely did she look, as, clad in pure white, with a soft veil falling over her head and shoulders, she was led by her father to the carriage.

As soon as Mabel had recovered from the fatigue she had gone through, arrangements were made to leave Melville for a month. The Isle of Wight had been decided on for their visit, after many places had been proposed and rejected.

It was towards the end of October that the whole party, including Ethel and her children, started for Ventnor. Lord Melton had gone to Melton Park, and from there on a visit to a friend of his, to join a shooting party, but he was to join them at Ventnor in the course of a week or two.

The change was certainly beneficial to Mabel, who became daily stronger and more cheerful, although she would never again be the gay, thoughtless girl of heretofore.

Granville had had measles at school, and it was thought advisable for him to have a change before returning to his studies, so it was arranged that he should meet his brother-in-law and travel with him down to Ventnor.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ONE morning, about three days after Percy and Granville had arrived, the latter proposed an excursion. "It will never do to stay in the same place all the time we are

here," he exclaimed ; " and the Isle of Wight is just the place for excursions, although, certainly, this is not the best time of year for them ; but the weather might be worse, and it certainly is not cold. I vote we go to Blackgang Chine to-day ; every one asks if you have been there, when they hear you've been to Ventnor."

No one raised any objection to the plan ; so, soon after breakfast they set off, Ethel and Mabel equipped in true sea-side costume, namely, white serges and sailor hats, trimmed with pale blue ribbons.

After a drive of about an hour, they arrived at their destination, and sending the carriages back to the hotel, commenced the descent of the Chine. They paused many times on their way to survey the scene, and very grand it was, with the stern rocks frowning down upon them, while below lay the broad English Channel, on which a few white sails glittered here and there. The silvery foam was dashing on the sands of Chale Bay, and further away on the right they could just see the Needles, standing

out like flakes of snow against the blue sky ; while the hollow sound of falling water in their ears seemed to heighten the grandeur of the view.

Granville, who did not quite enter into the poetry of nature, did not allow them much time for its contemplation. He declared the sea air had given him such an appetite that he was sure it was luncheon-time.

"That is rather a poor argument, my boy," said his father, "for you have been by the sea for the last three days."

"Well, then, it is the drive, or something in the air of Blackgang," answered Granville.

"I think we may as well begin to make our way to the hotel. It is some way off, and we can return here after lunch," said Mrs. Allington.

"Yes, then Mabel and I intend exploring," said Granville ; and as soon as they had finished their repast he started up, saying, "Now then, May, are you good for a scramble?"

"Oh, please be careful," exclaimed Mrs.

Allington ; " I really must forbid your going alone, unless you promise to do nothing rash—and remember, Granville, your sister has not quite recovered her strength yet."

" Oh, yes, we promise," answered Granville ; " we have too much regard for our limbs to go anywhere where it is very dangerous."

Mabel gave her mother a fond kiss before following her brother, and promised to use all the influence she possessed over that headstrong young gentleman, to prevent him from getting into mischief.

" What was all that hugging and kissing for ?" he asked, as Mabel joined him. " Anyone would think you were going to the top of Mont Blanc, at least, and expecting never to come down again."

" I hardly know why I kissed mamma, unless it was a feeling that——"

" Oh, bother the feelings," said Granville, not very politely interrupting his sister ; " you have got so awfully sentimental, May, since you broke off your engagement with Sir George Everard ; not half like yourself,

but I hope you will soon come round. Indeed, I think you have improved since you have had the pleasure of enjoying my enlivening society," he added, turning to look at her with a laugh. "Why, I declare if you are not crying! Come, cheer up, May; I would have said nothing about it if I had known it would hurt your feelings. Here is the path leading to the bottom of the Chine—shall I help you? Oh, I see, you prefer independence, and I admire you for it, so here goes." And after giving vent to his feelings by springing down a few steps and over some stones, he waited for his sister, and continued the descent more soberly, followed by her. Arrived at the foot of the cliffs, they made their way over the glistening sand to Chale Bay. There Mabel seated herself on a huge boulder to rest, while Granville went on exploring, as he expressed it, remarking they had better make the most of their time, as it did not look as if it would last fine all day, for the wind was springing up, and there were clouds in the horizon.

Mabel sat still for some time after her brother had left her, pondering on the beauty of the scene before her. The sands were almost deserted at that late season of the year, and Mabel was the only person at Chale Bay, as the few stragglers who had been strolling about when she and Granville arrived had, one by one, disappeared. The only sound to be heard was the noise of the waves breaking on the beach. Presently she rose and began searching for shells, to take back to little Gerald. She did not know how long she had been alone, when she heard her name called, and looking up, saw Granville running towards her, and waving excitedly.

"What is it?" she asked, as he came nearer.

"Run, Mabel, run, to the path we came down by! Quick, quick! or we shall be too late—the tide is rising fast!"

Mabel suddenly remembered that the sea had been rapidly nearing her feet since her brother had left her, and, impelled by despair, the two ran as hard as they could

in the direction by which they had come. But, alas ! on turning a jutting wall of rock, to their horror they saw the tide had been before them, and now a broad sheet of water lay between them and safety ! They both looked up at the insurmountable wall of cliffs, and then at one another, in blank dismay.

“What *shall* we do ? oh, what *shall* we do ?” said Granville.

“Is there no other hope of escape ?” asked his sister.

“None ! See, our spot of dry sand is smaller every minute, as the water gains ground ! Oh, Mabel, Mabel, what can we do ? We can’t stay here to be drowned !”

Mabel was standing perfectly calm, silently praying, and trying to think of some way of escape. A few months ago she would have given way to tears or despair, but now she could face death more calmly. The best part of her character was now to be brought into play.

“Speak, Mabel !” said her brother impatiently.

"Granville, you can swim, that is our only chance, so——"

"But, can you?" he broke in.

"No!"

"Then you must let me take you; I think I shall be able to manage," he said eagerly.

"No, that would be impossible, we should both be drowned. You must go alone. There is no time to lose. Swim to the path by which we came down. Let me help you off with your coat and waistcoat."

"What, leave you here? A likely thing! No, I am not quite such a coward!"

"Oh, Granville, don't lose time in talking. Do you not see it is our only chance? You may get a boat or a rope, and come for me. Oh, be quick—*quick*! You will never have strength to battle with the tide if you wait!"

Granville did not contest the point any longer, on hearing the good reasoning his sister brought forward; but throwing his arms round her neck, and impressing a hearty kiss on her pale cheek, said—"All

right, May, keep up your spirits ; I will get a boat as fast as I can. Meanwhile, put your back against the cliff, and keep as firm a footing as you can till we come."

With these words he began wading into the water, until it reached his waist, and then, turning to wave a last good-bye, he struck out in the direction of Blackgang Chine.

Mabel watched him out of sight, and then her self-command almost deserted her. She felt she had seen her brother for the last time on earth, as she knew it would be quite impossible for him to send a boat in time to save her. She felt thankful that at least Granville would be safe, and kneeling on the sand, she commended herself to the care of her Heavenly Father. Then rising, she went to the foot of the cliff, to wait—for death ! A thought suddenly struck her. Why not endeavour to attract the attention of the sailors on board that schooner she saw not so very far off ? She had heard of such things being done before. Quick as thought she slipped off her white skirt, and

waved it as hard as she could. Was it fancy, or did she really see some movement at the side of the yacht? She almost held her breath in suspense. No, it is no fancy, there really is a black speck on the water, and making its way towards her. She watches it in agonising suspense. It will never reach her in time! See, the water is coming nearer—*nearer*! It reaches her feet! She will be washed away! There is nothing but bare rock to cling to! Another wave dashes against her!—she loses her hold! Oh, awful moment! She feels herself slipping into the cruel, cold waters! One final effort to regain her footing, and then she is washed off, and feels herself sinking—*sinking*, with the dull sound of water in her ears, while in her mind arise the words—“I heard the voice of a great multitude and as the voice of many waters, saying, Alleluia.” Then all is blank, and everything fades from her memory.

Her last thought is of that world where there is no more sea, and of Him who has prepared it for His loved ones.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AFTER Granville had waved his farewell to Mabel, he struck out in the direction of Blackgang Chine ; but it was some time before he could regain his footing, as the waves by this time were breaking with such force against the rocks, that he was afraid of being dashed to pieces. After some violent efforts he succeeded in grasping a rock, and so steadied himself as to stand on his feet, and make his way along. He felt very exhausted, but there was no time to be lost, so he hurried as well as he was able up the incline. As he was reaching the top, he heard his name called from above, and on looking up, saw his brother-in-law, who was alone with little Gerald.

“ Where are the rest ? ” cried Granville, as he approached him.

Percy, on seeing Granville alone and dripping wet, was alarmed, and eagerly inquired what was the matter.

“Mabel is drowning in Chale Bay! Save her! save her!” was all the poor boy could say, before he sank on the ground, half fainting from exhaustion.

Lord Melton needed no second bidding, but putting Gerald down, and telling him to stay with Uncle Granville, he hurried after the rest of the party.

The consternation and grief his tidings caused were, of course, terrible. No time, however, was lost in regrets. Colonel Allington and his son-in-law started off instantly in search of a boat, which they succeeded in obtaining, and rowed in the direction of Chale Bay.

But, alas! the waves are now dashing against the wall of cliff, and not a sign of a white dress is to be seen. Every trace of sand has disappeared.

What is that floating on the surface of the water, rising with every wave? Can it be the object they are seeking? They row desperately in its direction, with breath almost suspended from anxiety, but again are they doomed to disappointment; it is

only a white skirt. They lift it into the boat ; every memento of her is precious now. Oh, where can the owner be ? Neither of them dared to put his thoughts into words, as they gazed sadly at the rescued garment. There is something else not far off. This time they dared not hope. Pulling towards it, they found it to be a well-known little sailor hat, with a blue ribbon floating from it. With a groan, Colonel Allington leant over the side and brought it into the boat, placing it almost reverently upon the skirt ; then turning to Percy, said in a despairing voice, " I fear all further search is useless."

They continued the search nevertheless, unwilling to give up the slightest chance, till night began to spread her veil upon the earth, and the boatman said he feared a storm was brewing, and the darkness would soon prevent them distinguishing any object.

So, mournfully they rowed back to Blackgang. The whole party returned to Ventnor that night, Mrs. Allington feeling as if the blow were greater than she could bear.

Fortunately Granville's health called for all her attention, as the anxiety and exhaustion he had endured had brought on a feverish attack, in consequence of his having so lately recovered from measles.

Every means was taken to discover the fate of their dear child. Rewards were offered, and the next day Colonel Allington and Lord Melton started again for Chale, but found nothing had been heard of Mabel.

"We shall have a hurricane again to-night, sir," said the sailor of whom they inquired; "and with these November gales, it is hardly safe for boats to venture out much on this coast; but everything shall be done that is possible."

Again they had to return with the sad news, which was almost worse than the certainty that Mabel was no more; for it is suspense and hope deferred that gradually break the heart. So Mrs. Allington felt, when, on leaving Granville's room, she met her husband on the stairs, and heard him say that nothing had been discovered.

Her self-command then gave way. She

her mother on the subject
that night.

When Mabel retired
more miserable than she had
past. The same passion
her mother all, came over
jected as a temptation.

"I dare not break my
has done so with me," she
self again and again. "It
me a lifetime of misery,"
said of Mabel Allington
promise," she continued, un-
ing herself up with an
Captain Danvers had
moment he could not agree
her of possessing no spirit.

Mrs. Allington was greatly
perplexed by Mabel's conduct,
slowly and sadly relinquish-
gaining her child's confidence.
a mystery to her, she kept
all feeling with regard to
could it mean? Ethel was
more like herself during

... ..

...the ... of ...

...to the ...
...the ...
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...the ...

1. The first step is to identify the problem or question that needs to be answered. This involves understanding the context and the specific requirements of the task.

Date: _____
 Page: _____

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage in the 1990s*, Washington, D.C., 1993.

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Journal of Internal Medicine 247: 111–118

3. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 277: 1033-1037.

did not know how much hope had buoyed her up until then.

It is needless to describe the two or three days of agonising suspense that followed. At last, one by one, they all gave up hope, except Granville, who was quite angry when he saw preparations made for going into mourning.

How thankful Mrs. Allington felt now for that last kiss of Mabel's ! She wondered if any presentiment had caused her to return for it. Who knows ?

CHAPTER XL.

A BEAUTIFUL schooner is making its way, with spread sails, past Blackgang. The captain and mate are standing on the deck consulting about the weather, which looks ominous, when a gentleman, evidently the owner of the yacht, approaches them, and points out something that has attracted his attention on the coast. The captain takes the telescope, and after gazing through it

for a minute, exclaims : “ Yes, it is evidently some one in distress ; it looks like a woman. She will certainly be drowned, unless something is done to save her at once, for the tide is rising fast.”

“ Let a boat be lowered instantly, then,” rejoined the gentleman addressed.

His order was obeyed with alacrity, and soon a boat, with four men, pushed off from the vessel’s side.

“ Pull with a will, my boys !” cried the mate, who was steering, “ or we shall not be in time.”

“ No, I fear we shall be too late ; the tide is dashing right against the cliffs. If the person can only swim there will be some hope.”

As the captain spoke, he saw the subject of his remarks washed off the rock, and disappear in the surging waters.

“ She has sunk, I declare !” he exclaimed. “ Directly she rises to the surface, you, Bill, be ready to lay hold of her ; the rest must manage the boat.”

“ Ay, ay, sir,” was the response.

The next minute one of the sailors shouted : "There she be, captain, I saw something white rise over there." They rowed in the direction pointed out, and the sailor addressed as Bill, leaning over the side of the boat, grappled something on its downward course, and managed to bring it to the surface. It proved to be a female figure, but whether dead or alive they could not tell. Laying it at the bottom of the boat, they rowed back again to the vessel with their burden.

"Lend us a hand!" the mate shouted, as they came alongside.

A sailor leant over: "All right, what is it?"

"A woman, but she seems to be dead, as far as I can make out. Come down and lend us a hand in hauling her up."

The sailor addressed sprang down to the boat, and taking the body from the mate's arms, regained the deck with it.

"What's to be done with her?" he exclaimed, as the mate followed him; "I don't see the use of lumbering up the yacht with drowned people."

"Better take her below to the captain's cabin," said the mate ; but as he spoke the owner of the yacht approached them.

"Have you saved her ?" he asked.

"Ay, sir, but I am not sure that we were not too late. Where would you wish her taken ?"

"To my cabin," he answered, and turned away.

"Well, now, that's curious, never to want to see her, nor ask if she be dead or alive," remarked a sailor who was standing near.

"Well, you know, master hates women. Take her down at once, Headland, and I'll send the old woman to her," said the mate. By the old woman was meant the steward's wife, who always accompanied him on every cruise he made. She was soon in the best cabin, bustling about and endeavouring to restore animation to the beautiful, still form which lay on the cushions. At last her efforts were rewarded by a quivering of the eyelids, which gradually opened, and disclosed a pair of dark-blue eyes. "Where am I ?" the patient asked faintly.

"Among friends, dearie," answered her nurse. "You would have been drowned if we had not picked you up off Chale Bay."

"Oh, I remember now ; I thought I was drowning. Are you taking me back to Ventnor ? My friends there will be so anxious about me."

"I don't think we are going to put into Ventnor to-night. We were bound for the French coast, past the Channel Islands ; but of course if it is safe we shall put you down first. I will go and ask my husband about it. But drink this," and giving her some brandy-and-water, which was obediently taken, the kind-hearted old creature hurried off.

She soon returned, with a weather-beaten sailor, whom she introduced as her husband. He seemed rather bashful in the presence of the young lady ; but his wife, giving him a poke, told him to say why they could not put back to the Isle of Wight that night.

"Well, you see, miss, these seem to be the November gales, and there's no telling

what weather we may have, for it's looking very dirty all round. Most likely we should go to pieces on the rocks at the back of the Island if we tried to take you there to-night ; it's a dangerous part in rough weather."

And having delivered himself of this speech, he remained turning his sou'-wester round and round in his hand, and looked towards his wife for further orders.

"Now, you can go and tell master that the young lady is ready to see him."

"No, no—wait a moment," said Mabel ; "I am hardly prepared to receive visitors yet. Are my things dry ?" And she glanced down at the wrapper which had been put round her while her clothes were drying, and shook back the long tresses that were falling over her shoulders.

"To be sure," said the stewardess, "they have been before the fire some hours, and ought to be. I'll go and see, and you come, too," she added, turning to her obedient husband.

Mabel's toilet was completed under difficulties, for the yacht was rolling first on one

side and then on the other. When finished, her new lady's-maid stood at a short distance to survey her, with arms a-kimbo. Then, with an emphatic nod, said "You'll do," and hurried off.

It was not long before voices were heard outside the cabin door, which was opened. Mabel started up, to be prepared to thank her benefactor. He came in—their eyes met——and Mabel suddenly felt a deadly faintness come over her. Her eyes grew dim, she could hear nothing distinctly, and, with a faint cry, she fell down senseless ; for in her preserver she recognised Sir George Everard !

He was hardly less moved than she, only in a different way.

In a stern tone, he turned to the stewardess, saying she ought to have known the young lady was not yet sufficiently recovered to bear the excitement of seeing anyone ; then, without waiting for a reply, he strode out of the cabin, and began to pace up and down the deck.

There was a stern conflict going on

between the winds and waves around ; but there was a sterner one raging in the breast of Sir George Everard. A conflict between love and pride ; for bitterly he felt now that the former feeling was not destroyed within him. Crushed it may have been, for the time, when the first tempest of bitter disappointment and misery swept over his soul—but crushed only to raise its drooping head and revive at the sight of that fragile form which his cabin contained.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE night passed slowly and drearily to Mabel, after she recovered consciousness, but towards morning she fell asleep from pure exhaustion.

The next day brought no signs of better weather. Still a heavy gale was blowing, and the driving rain caused such a mist, that the pilot could not properly ascertain the exact spot in which they were. It was almost dangerous to continue their course under such

circumstances, and yet to turn back was as bad. There was no chance of putting into port, as no land could yet be sighted.

Mabel's breakfast was brought her by the stewardess.

"What a fearful night!" exclaimed the former; "I thought we were going to the bottom every time the vessel gave a roll."

"Lor' bless you, my dear, 'twas only a stiffish breeze. You'll soon get used to that sort of thing if you go to sea much. I'm thinking we shall have a worse one to-night, if the glass tells true."

It only told the truth too well, for towards night the gale increased to a hurricane. Poor Mabel was alone in the cabin, for the stewardess was attending to her husband, who had been hurt by a splinter from the falling of a topmast.

All was confusion on deck. The night grew darker and darker. A feeble light was burning where Mabel was; and she listened to the sounds going on above her head, trying to nerve herself to face for the

second time a watery death, and to put away all thoughts of earthly love, which would come so vividly across her heart when she remembered in whose vessel she was.

Suddenly a great shock threw her violently against the opposite side of the cabin ; then came a grating sound, and cries from above, " She's struck !"

Mabel then knew that all hope was gone. Presently she felt her feet growing cold, and on looking down, she discovered a narrow stream of water making its way across the floor.

A feeling of desertion came over her ; she was left to drown, and *no* one cared. With a bitter cry she fell on her knees, grasping the edge of the table to steady herself, remembering that, although deserted by all on earth, there was One who has promised *never* to forsake those who trust in Him.

In a few moments the cabin door flew open, and Sir George entered. He stood still for a moment, gazing on the scene before him—such a contrast to the one he had

just quitted, where all was confusion and dismay. With the light shedding its feeble ray on her face, knelt Mabel, her hands clasped, and with such a look of peace and trust in her face as he had never seen there before. It made her look hardly earthly, as some of the Madonnas of our great masters. He had never thought her so beautiful.

She started up directly she became aware of his presence, the noise having prevented her hearing the door open.

"Mabel, this is no place for you ; come with me," he exclaimed, vainly endeavouring to speak coldly and distantly.

Hearing him call her by her Christian name, as in old times, nearly overcame her composure ; but before she had time to speak, he caught her by the arm, and drew her with gentle force towards the door, saying : " They are putting off a boat—we must be quick."

Mabel could hardly stand, as the vessel was rolling still ; and Sir George seeing this, stooped, lifted her in his arms, and made for the deck.

"Forgive me," he whispered, "but it is necessary for the safety of us both."

On reaching the deck, he deposited his light burden, and hurried to the side where the boat was putting off. But what was his horror when he discovered it was *gone* ! He shouted himself hoarse, but all in vain ; and in despair he returned to the place where he had left Mabel, and in a few words explained their case.

Mabel sank on the deck with a shudder, covering her eyes with her hands. For a few moments neither spoke ; she was the first to break the silence.

"I am the cause of this peril ! Oh, why did you not leave me to drown, instead of trying to save me, only to lose your own life?"

"Mabel," he said, gently, "*do* not, oh, do not speak in this way. I can never feel too thankful for having been the means of saving you, although I fear it is only to drag you back again to the same death that threatened you——"

"Is there *no* hope?" she asked, interrupting him and looking round wildly.

"I fear none ! I dare not raise false hope, and I see no possibility of escape, for the vessel must go to pieces before the morning."

"It is not for myself I care," murmured Mabel. "But that I should be the cause of the loss of a life so valuable as——"

"Do not finish what you were beginning to say, I entreat," he said earnestly ; "but listen to me for a moment. I believe we have been brought together that we should be reconciled before we die; and in the face of that death I acknowledge that I have wronged you, Mabel ; pride has not allowed me to say it before. Will you forgive me ? Is it *too* much to ask ?"

Sir George took one of the icy-cold hands in his ; it was not withdrawn, and he leant down to hear her answer.

"It is *I* who ought to ask for forgiveness. It is *I* who have wronged *you*. I deceived you ; but oh, I loved you so I *could* not refuse you as I ought to have done that night in the conservatory. I tried to do so, but my tongue positively refused to say the

words I intended. I can tell you all this now. I can acknowledge my feelings in the face of that death which is awaiting us both : only say you forgive me and I shall die happy."

"Fully ! if there be anything to forgive," he said fervently, folding her in his arms.

"My *own* darling—yes, mine now entirely—there will never be anything to separate us from henceforth ; even in death we shall be united. Fool that I was not to have understood in what a difficult position you were placed, but that wretched, designing man made it appear so differently ; as though you had willingly deceived me."

Then followed confessions on both sides, and many things that had seemed strange and mysterious before were cleared up in that last solemn interview. And from earth they turned their conversation to eternal things, and together they prayed for forgiveness and for reunion in a happier world, where no more separation can come, and tears shall be wiped away from all eyes.

CHAPTER XLII.

It was early on a bright morning, after two or three stormy days in November, that Granville entered the breakfast-room of the house they had taken at Ventnor. His face looked serious, as walking up to the window he said to himself, "I suppose now it is fine we shall lose no time in starting for home, and really there does not seem much use in staying here, for no tidings are heard, and everyone has given up all hope of any except me, and even *I* begin to doubt now. I am sure it makes mother and all of us feel it more, seeing the account given in every local newspaper we happen to take in hand—here for instance," and taking one up he began :

"‘Sad and fatal accident at Chale Bay. —We regret to hear that the youngest daughter of Colonel and the Hon. Mrs. Allington——’

"Pshaw ! I’ve no patience with those

editors, nor with the kind sympathising curates and friends who send in their cards of kind inquiries and their letters of consolation—*consolation* indeed! It would be much more consoling if they were never written at all, raking up as they do the misery over and over again, until mother looks perfectly ill. There's the postman, no doubt he has brought a few more epistles of the same kind."

The man-servant entered, and putting a pile of letters on the table, withdrew. Granville took them up one by one carelessly, remarking on the covers to himself, as he did so: "*This* is evidently an advertisement for 'sudden mourning;' *that* is a note of sympathy; *here* is a paper giving an account, no doubt, of the '*sad occurrence*,'" and he unfolded it, and was beginning to read when Lord Melton entered the room. "Why, Granville, who is your friend? I heard you talking away most volubly as I came downstairs."

"Well, isn't this enough to make a fellow talk?" asked Granville. "Just listen

for a minute, while I read you something here: ‘Melancholy and fatal accident near Blackgang.—It is with deep regret we have to announce the sad death of Miss Mabel Allington, aged eighteen, the daughter of Col. and the Hon. Mrs. Allington. It seems that deceased and her brother were overtaken by the tide at Chale Bay; the latter being able to swim, saved his life, but the unfortunate young lady was washed away. Every means to recover the body have been ineffectual, and it is to be feared it has been carried out to sea. The event has cast quite a gloom over Ventnor, where the family, including the Earl and Countess of Melton, are now staying, and much sympathy is felt for the bereaved family.’”

“Well, my dear fellow,” said Percy, as Granville impatiently threw down the paper, “what would you have? I think they have put it in very nicely.”

“What right had they to put it in at all? We do not yet know positively that there is no hope.”

Lord Melton did not reply, but quietly

taking up the paper, said : " It is not worth while to let this stay here for your mother or Ethel to see. I will ring and order it to be taken away."

As he approached the bell, a sudden exclamation from Granville made him turn quickly round ; he saw him holding a letter in his hand, and staring at it without moving a muscle of his face ; the next moment he rushed across the room to his brother-in-law, exclaiming—"Just look at this, why, it is May's own handwriting ! You see I was right all the time. It is for Ethel ; oh, do call her down ; I must know what it says ;" and he was leaving the room to take her the letter, when Lord Melton stopped him, saying, "Stay, Granville ! Remember your sister and mother both believe Mabel to be drowned, and as they may not possess quite such strong nerves as you, the sudden news may have serious consequences. Give me the letter, and I will tell Ethel, and let her break it to your mother."

Granville gave up the letter rather re-

luctantly, after making an agreement that he should read it afterwards.

That morning's post had, indeed, brought joyful news. The letter was from Mabel herself, written from Jersey, telling how nearly her life had been lost a second time, and how when she and Sir George (who had enclosed a note for Col. Allington) had thought all hope was over, for the yacht was fast going to pieces, and their last prop was giving way—a shout fell on their ears, above the roaring of the wind and waves, and they felt themselves lifted into a boat; then they remembered no more. Sir George had been the first to recover consciousness, and the warmth of a cheery cabin fire soon restored Mabel. They found themselves on board a passage steamer from Southampton, bound for the Channel Islands.

It appeared that the boat pushed off from the wreck because the captain had said if any others were added to the number they must all be swamped, and self-preservation being the predominant feeling in every breast, they cut the boat off, hoping to hail a vessel and


send a boat from thence to the wreck. Fortunately this was the case, but it was some time before a boat could be manned, and the ill-fated schooner discovered. I will not attempt to describe the meeting that took place between the re-united family.

Their joy seemed almost too perfect, for not only were the lost found, but love and confidence had also been restored in that fearful night, on the wreck of a vessel in the midst of the raging elements.

And now the history of the Allingtons is come to a close, as far as the early part of their life is concerned, and to anyone who has had sufficient patience to follow them through their different joys and sorrows, and who feels interested to know how it fared with them in after life, we will raise the curtain, and reveal one more scene, some years later.

CHAPTER XLIII.

It is Christmas night. The wind is howling round the gables of Melville House, and



the sleet is driving against the windows, but the interior presents a very pleasant contrast to the exterior of the house. Round the drawing-room fire is gathered a family party, consisting of Colonel and Mrs. Alington, the Earl and Countess of Melton, Dr. and Mrs. Woode, and Sir George and Lady Everard. In another part of the room is a rather noisy group of children, who seem evidently to enjoy the delights of romping with Uncle Granville. First among the group we notice a handsome little fellow, with bright golden hair, dressed in black velvet, who looks quite a little lord, and seems fully to feel his dignity, as his playmates all look up to him with respect—all except Uncle Granville, who delights to tease his young lordship, and thus lower his importance. Next to him there is a lovely little girl, the exact image of her brother, on a small scale; a perfect little fairy is the Lady Eva Trevor, and a general pet, with her clinging, winsome ways. There is another little sister, still younger, on mamma's lap, but it is rather too noisy a group to

trust her among yet, although little Muriel makes desperate efforts to release herself from her mother's grasp, and join them. The quiet little girl, standing next to her cousin Eva, and who appears half afraid of romping, as if unaccustomed to other children, is little Ethel Woode, Mary's only child, and she is such a delicate little thing that she requires the greatest care. There remains only one more individual to be mentioned, and that is Graham Everard, the noisiest of the little party, with dark brown eyes and hair, he looks what he is—full of mischief and high spirits, and requires the greatest watchfulness on the part of his mother to keep him in anything like order. He has a baby sister, who is too young at present to appear on the scene so late, and is sleeping unconsciously through its first Christmas night, in the nursery.

And now we will turn to the elders of the party, and see how time has dealt with them since last we saw them.

Mrs. Allington is looking the same beautiful, dignified woman as ever; there are just

a few streaks of grey beginning to make their appearance among the braids of her dark hair, otherwise time seems to have left no trace on her gentle brow, and her voice is still as sweet as when we first knew her.

Colonel Allington looks older far in comparison with his wife; his hair has become iron grey, and his forehead bears lines of thought. By his side, with one arm entwined in his, sits his favourite daughter Ethel, still radiantly beautiful, although the slight girlish figure is beginning to merge into that of the dignified matron.

Mary has scarcely altered at all, but there is a little shade of care on her face as she watches her child with rather an anxious look.

Mabel is evidently as lively as she ever was, but there is an expression of thoughtfulness in her countenance that her mother is thankful to see; and her eye no longer rests on Mabel with the anxiety it used to do.

The gentlemen made a move to go into the billiard-room until tea should be an-

nounced. Granville suddenly broke the silence which followed, by exclaiming, "Well, Mabel, have you heard the news? Captain Danvers (an old admirer of yours by-the-by) has married an old lady for her money, and it turns out she has not nearly as much as he expected, so he is delightfully sold."

At that name Mabel gave a little start, and turned slightly pale; it was the first time it had been mentioned since her marriage. Then remembering that Granville had never heard the secret of her first engagement, thought it better to say nothing.

"But that is not all," continued Granville. "Directly he finds out that this old dame has taken him in, he makes off and tries to get quit of her; but she is too sharp for him. So she goes to her lawyer, and together they make up a case against him, and it turns out after all that he had been married before to some one in Scotland, who had lost sight of him; so directly this appears in the newspapers she

brings her case against him. Now he has made off, to America or some such place, to escape the detectives, who have not yet succeeded in finding him; but I should not think he felt in the most comfortable position, hunted down like a cat."

Mabel clasped her hands together with a sigh, saying, under her breath, "What have I not escaped?"

Mrs. Allington, laying her hands on both of Mabel's, said, in a voice trembling with emotion, "Oh, my darling, we can never be sufficiently thankful you were, in mercy, spared such a fate."

The tea entering at that moment stopped further comments; and the gentlemen following soon after, the children were sent off to their respective nurses and rooms, and the evening ended in music and general conversation.

And now I think the curtain may drop. Sufficient has been given to show how a mother's love and judicious training were rewarded in seeing the happiness of her children and their children; and in feeling,

that although led by "intricate paths," they had proved the best, for in whatever future trials might await them, their hearts were so firmly fixed on the joys that never fail, that all earthly troubles would pass over them as the waves on the surface of the ocean—where all below is peace and calm—and in faith looking forward to that time when one by one they should all meet in "the Haven where they would be."

THE END.





